$12.00

LITTLE MISS · PEGGY

ILLUSTRATED · BY WALTER · CRANE

LITTLE MISS PEGGY:

ONLY A NURSERY STORY

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First Edition printed (*Crown* 8*vo*) 1887
Reprinted (*Globe* 8*vo*) 1888, 1891, 1893, 1896, 1899, 1902
Reprinted (*Crown* 8*vo*) 1902, 1906, 1909, 1912
First Illustrated Pocket Classics Edition 1924

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

" 'What is the matter, little girls?' said the lady.'"

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LITTLE MISS PEGGY:

ONLY A NURSERY STORY

BY

MRS. MOLESWORTH

WITH PICTURES BY WALTER CRANE

LONDON
MACMILLAN & CO.
LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET
1924

To the Memory of

E. L.

THE DEAR YOUNG FRIEND
WHO SUGGESTED ITS NAME TO THIS LITTLE STORY,
AND FROM WHOSE LATE HOME,
SO INTIMATELY ASSOCIATED WITH HER,
THIS DEDICATION IS MADE.

BINDON, *August* 1887.

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This happens thus, or that finds place."

My Opposite Neighbour.

CHAPTER I

A BREAKFAST PARTY

"Henry was every morning fed
With a full mess of milk and bread."

MARY LAMB.

'No," said Peggy to herself, with a little sigh, "the naughty clouds has covered it up to-day. I can't see it."

"Miss Peggy," came nurse's voice from the other side of the room, "your breakfast's waiting. Come to the table, my dear, and stand quiet while Master Thor says the grace."

Nurse spoke kindly, but she meant what she said. Peggy turned slowly from the window and took her place among her brothers. She, and Thorold and Terence, the two oldest boys, sat opposite nurse, and beside nurse was Baby, who required a great deal of room to himself at table, baby though he was.

He had so many things to do during a meal, you see, which grown-up children think quite unnecessary. He had to drum with a spoon, first in one fat hand and then in the other; he had to dip his crust first in nurse's cup of tea and next in Hal's jug of milk to see which tasted best, and there would have been no fun in doing either if he hadn't had to stretch a long way across; and besides all this he felt really obliged now and then to put his feet upon the table for a change, one at a time, of course. For even he, clever as he was, could not have got both together out of the bars of his chair without toppling over. Nurse had for some time past been speaking about beginning "to break Master Baby in," but so far it had not got beyond speaking, and she contented herself with seating him beside her and giving him a good quarter of the table to himself, the only objection to which was that it gave things in general a rather lopsided appearance.

At the two ends sat Baldwin and Hal. Hal's real name, of course, was Henry, though he was never called by it. Baldwin, on the contrary, had no short name, partly perhaps because mamma thought "Baldie" sounded so ugly, and partly because there was something about Baldwin himself

"- Baby, who required a great deal of room to himself at table, baby though he was. He had so many things to do during a meal,

you see, which grown-up children think quite unnecessary. He had to drum with a spoon, first in one fat hand and then in the other; he had to dip his crust first in nurse's cup of tea and next in Hal's jug of milk to see which tasted best, and there would have been no fun in doing either if he hadn't had to stretch a long way across; and besides all this he felt really obliged now and then to put his feet up on the table for a change, one at a time, of course."

which made one not inclined to shorten his name. It suited him so well, for he was broad and comfortable and slow. He was never in a hurry, and he gave you the feeling that you needn't be in a hurry either. There was plenty of time for everything, for saying the whole of his name as well as for everything else.

That made a lot of brothers, didn't it? Five, counting baby, and to match them, or rather not to match them—for five and one are not a match at all—only one little girl! She wondered about it a good deal, when she had nothing else more interesting to wonder about. It seemed so very badly managed that she should have five brothers, and that the five brothers should only have one sister each. It wasn't always so, she knew. The children at the back had plenty of both brothers and sisters; she had found that out already. But I must not begin just yet about the children at the back; you will hear about them in good time.

There was a nice bowl of bread-and-milk at each child's place, and as bread-and-milk is much better hot than cold, it was generally eaten up quickly. But this morning, even after the grace was said, and the four brothers who weren't baby had got on very

well with theirs, Peggy sat, spoon in hand, gazing before her and not eating at all.

"What's the matter, Miss Peggy?" said nurse, when she had at last made Baby understand that he really *wasn't* to try to put his toes into her tea-cup, which had struck him suddenly as a very beautiful thing to do; "you've not begun to eat. Are you waiting for the sugar or the salt, or can't you fix which you want this morning?"

For there was a very nice and interesting rule in that nursery that every morning each child might choose whether he or she would have salt or sugar in the bread and milk. The only thing was that they had to be quick about choosing, and that was not always very easy.

Peggy looked up when nurse spoke to her.

"Peggy wasn't 'toosing," she said. Then she grew a little red. "*I* wasn't 'toosing," she went on. For Peggy was five—five a good while ago—and she wanted to leave off baby ways of talking. "I was wondering."

"Well, eat your breakfast, and when you've got half-way down the bowl you can tell us what you were wondering about," said nurse.

Peggy's spoon, already laden, continued its journey

to her mouth. But when it got there, and its contents were safely deposited between her two red lips, she gave a little cry.

"Oh!" she said, "it doesn't taste good. There's no salt or sugar."

"'Cos you didn't put any in, you silly girl," said Thor. "I saw, but I thought it'd be a good lesson. People shouldn't wonder when they're eating."

"Peggy wasn't eating; she was only going to eat," said Terry. "Never mind, Peg-top. Thor shan't tease you. Which 'll you have? Say quick," and he pulled forward the sugar-basin and the salt-cellar in front of his sister.

"Sugar, pelease," said Peggy. "It's so 'told this morning."

At this Thor burst out laughing.

"What a Peggy-speech," he said. "Sugar's no warmer than salt."

"Yes," said Baldwin, solemnly, from the other end of the table. "'Tis. There's sugar in toffee and in jam, and they're hot, leastways they're hot to be made. And there's salt in ices, for mamma said they're made with salt."

"What rubbish!" said Thor. "Nurse, isn't it

rubbish? And when did you ever see ices, I'd like to know, Baldwin?'

"I did," Baldwin maintained. "Onst. But I'll not tell you when, if you say rubbish."

"It is rubbish all the same, and I'll prove it," said Thor. "You know that nice smooth white sugar on the top of bridescake?—well, they ice that to put it on—I know they do. Don't they, nurse?"

"They call it icing, to be sure," nurse replied. "But that's no proof that ices themselves mayn't be made with salt, Master Thor, for when you come to think of it ices have sugar in them."

"To be sure they have," Thor cried, triumphantly. "Nurse has proved it—that sugar's no warmer than salt," which was not what nurse had intended to say at all.

But now Peggy, who all this time had been steadily eating, looked up again.

"Peggy was wondering," she said, "what's clouds. Is clouds alive?"

Thor was all ready with his "you silly girl" again, but this time Terry was before him.

"They can't be alive," he said. "They've got no hands, or feet, or mouths, and noses, and eyes, and——"

"They *has* noses," said Peggy, eagerly. "Peggy's seen them, and they has wings—the little ones has wings, they fly so fast. And p'raps they has got proper faces on their other sides, to look at the sun with. I've seen shiny bits of the other sides turned over."

"Yes," said Baldwin, solemnly again, as if that settled it, "so has I."

"But they're not alive, Peggy, they're really not. They fly because the wind blows them," said Terence.

"Oh!" said Peggy, with a deep-drawn breath, "I see. Then if we all blowed very hard at the window, if we all blowed together, couldn't we blow them away? I do so want to blow them away when they come over my hills."

But when she had said this she grew very red, just as if she had told something she had not meant to tell, and if any one had looked at her quite close they would have seen that there were tears in her eyes. Fortunately, however, no one had noticed her last words, for Thorold and Terence too had burst out laughing at the beginning of her speech.

"Fancy us all blowing out of the window together," they said. And they began puffing out their cheeks and pretending to blow very hard, which

made them look so funny that Peggy herself burst out laughing too.

"I'll tell you what," said Thor, when they were tired of laughing, "that reminds me of soap-bubbles, we haven't had any for such a time. Nurse, will you remember to let us have them the first wet half-holiday? Mamma 'll let us if you will."

"And the pipes?" said nurse. "There was six new got the last time, and they were to last, certain sure till the next time, and then——"

"Oh I know," said Thor, "we took them to school and never brought them back. Never mind—we'll get some more from old Mother Whelan. She always keeps lots. We'll keep our halfpennies for two Saturdays—that'll do. But we must be going, Terry and Baldwin. *I'm* all ready."

And he jumped up as he spoke, and pulled his satchel of books from under his chair, where he had put them to be all ready. Baldwin slowly got down from his place, for he was not only broad, but his legs were very short, and came up to nurse to be helped on with his little overcoat, while Terence began rushing about the room in a fuss, looking for one of his books, which as usual couldn't be found at the last minute.

"I had it just before breakfast, I'm *sure* I had," he went on repeating. "I haven't finished learning it, and I meant to look it over. Oh dear, what shall I do?"

The nursery party was too accustomed to Terry's misfortunes to be much upset by them. Peggy sat still for a moment or two considering. Then she spoke.

"Terry," she said, "look in Baby's cot.'

Off flew Terence, returning in triumph, grammar in hand.

"I'll learn it on the way to school. How did you know it was there, Peggy?"

"I sawed you reaching over to kiss Baby when you comed in to ask nurse for a new shoe-lace this morning," said Peggy, with great pride.

"Good girl," said Terence, as he slammed the door and rushed downstairs to overtake his two brothers.

The nursery seemed very quiet when the three big boys had gone. Quiet but not idle; there was always a great deal to do first thing of a morning, and Peggy had her own share of the doing to see to. She took off her own breakfast pinafore and put on a quite clean one—one that looked quite clean any-

way, just as if it had never been on, even though it had really been used two or three times. Peggy called it her "prayers pinafore," and it always lasted a whole week, as it was only worn to go down to the dining-room for five or ten minutes. Then she washed her hands and stood still for nurse to give a tidying touch to her soft fair hair, though it really didn't need it,—Peggy's hair never looked messy,—and then she took off Hal's over pinafore which he wore on the top of his blouse at meal-times, and helped him to wash his hands, by which time nurse and baby were also ready, and the little procession set off on their journey. If the prayers bell had not sounded yet, or did not sound as they made their way down, nurse would stop at mamma's door and tap, and the answer was sure to be "Come in." Then nurse would go on downstairs with Baby, and Peggy and Hal would trot in to see mamma, and wait a moment or two till she was ready. She was almost always nearly ready, unless she was very, very tired; and in that case she would tell them to go downstairs and come up and see her again after prayers, as she was going to have breakfast in bed. They rather liked these days, though of course they were sorry for mamma to be so tired, but it was very

interesting to watch her having her breakfast, and generally one or two dainty bits of toast and marmalade would find their way to the two little mouths.

It was only since last winter that mamma had been so often tired and not able to get up early. Before then she used always to come up to the nursery to see her six children at breakfast, and prayers were early enough for the three boys to stay for them, instead of having them at school. For mamma was not at all a "lazy" mother, as you might think if I did not explain. But last winter she had been very ill indeed, so ill that papa looked dreadfully unhappy, and the boys had to take off their boots downstairs so as not to make any noise when they passed her door, and the days seemed very long to Peggy and Hal, worst to Peggy of course, for Hal was still so little that almost all his life belonged to the nursery. It was during that time that Peggy first found out the white spot on the hill, which I am going to tell you about, for she used to climb up on the window-sill and sit there looking out at whatever there was to see for hours at a time.

This morning mamma was evidently not tired,

for just as the children got to the landing on to which her door opened, out she came.

"Well, darlings," she said, "there you are! Have the boys got off to school all rightly, nurse?"

"Oh yes, ma'am," nurse was beginning, but Peggy interrupted her.

"Terry loosed his book, mamma dear, and Peg—*I* founded it; I knewed where it was 'cos I used my eyes like you said."

"That was a very good thing," said mamma. She had talked to Peggy about using her eyes a good deal, for Peggy had rather a trick of going to sleep with her eyes open, like many children, and it becomes a very tiresome trick if it isn't cured, and makes one miss a great many chances of being useful to others, and of enjoying pleasant things one's self. "Poor Terry—I wish he wasn't so careless. Where was his book this time?"

"In such a funny place, mamma dear," said Peggy. "In Baby's cot," and at the sound of his name Baby crowed, which made both Peggy and Hal burst out laughing, so that mamma had to hold their hands firmly to prevent their tumbling down stairs.

After prayers were over nurse took Baby and

Hal away, but papa said Peggy might stay for a few minutes.

"I've scarcely seen you the last day or two, old woman," he said; "you were fast asleep when I came home. What have you been about?"

"About," Peggy repeated, looking puzzled.

"Well—what have you been doing with yourself?" he said again.

"I've been doing nothing with *myself*," Peggy replied, gravely. "I've done my lessons and my sewing, and I've used my eyes."

"Well, and isn't all that yourself?" asked papa, who was rather a tease. "You've done your sewing with your fingers and your lessons with your mind, and you've used your eyes for both—mind, fingers, eyes—those are all parts of yourself."

Peggy spread out her two hands on the table and looked at the ten pink fingers.

"Them's my fingers," she said, "but I don't know where that other thing is—that what thinks. I'd like to know where it is. Papa, can't you tell me?"

There came a puzzled look into her soft gray eyes—mamma knew that look; when it stayed long it was rather apt to turn into tears.

"Arthur," she said to Peggy's papa, "you're too

fond of teasing. Peggy dear, nobody can see that part of you; there are many things we can't ever see, or hear, or touch, which are real things all the same."

Peggy's face lightened up again. She nodded her head softly, as if to say that she understood. Then she got down from her chair and went up to her father to kiss him and say good-bye.

"Going already, Peg!" he said. "Don't you like papa teasing you?"

"I don't mind," said Peggy, graciously; "you're only a big boy, papa. I'm going 'cos nurse wants me to keep Baby quiet while she makes the beds."

But when she got round to the other side of the table to her mother, she lingered a moment.

"Mamma," she whispered, "*it's* not there this morning—Peggy's fairy house. It's all hided up. Mamma——"

"Well, darling?"

"Are you *sure* it'll come back again?"

"Quite sure, dear. It's only hidden by the clouds, as I've told you before. You know you've often been afraid it was gone, and it's always come again."

"Yes, to be sure," said Peggy. "What a silly little girl I am, mamma dear."

And she laughed her own little gentle laugh. I can't tell how it was that Peggy's little laugh used sometimes to bring tears to her mother's eyes.

When she got up to the nursery again she found she was very much wanted. Nurse was in the night nursery which opened into the day one, and looked out to the back of the house just as the other looked to the front. And Baby was sitting on the hearth-rug, with Hal beside him, both seeming far from happy.

"Baby's defful c'oss, Peggy," said poor Hal.

And Baby, though he couldn't speak, pouted out his lips and looked very savage at Hal, which of course was very unreasonable and ungrateful of him, as Hal had been doing everything he could to amuse him, and had only objected to Baby pulling him across the floor by his curls.

"Oh Baby," said Peggy, "that isn't good. Poor Hal's hair—see how you've tugged it."

For Baby was still grasping some golden threads in his plump fists.

"Him sinks zem's feaders," said Hal, apologetically. He was so fond of Baby that he couldn't bear any one to say anything against him except himself.

"But Baby must learn hairs isn't feathers," said Peggy, solemnly. "And it isn't good to let him pull the feathers out of his parrot either, Hal," she continued, "for some day he might have a *live* parrot, and then it would be cooel, and the parrot would *bite* him—yes it would, Baby."

This was too much for Baby. He drew the corner of his mouth down, then he opened it wide, very wide, and was just going to roar when Peggy threw her arms round him and kissed him vigorously.

"He's sorry, Hal—dear Baby—he's so very sorry. Kiss him, Hal. Let's all kiss together," and the three soft faces all met in a bunch, which Baby found so amusing that instead of continuing his preparations for a good cry, he thought better of it, and went off into a laugh.

"That's right," said Peggy. "Now if you'll both be very good boys I'll tell you a story. Just wait a minute till I've tooked off my prayers pinafore."

She jumped up to do so. While she was unfastening it her eyes moved to the window; she gave a little cry and ran forward. The day was clearing up, the sun was beginning faintly to shine, and the clouds were breaking.

"Mamma was right," exclaimed Peggy, joyfully

"And in another moment they were settled on the hearth-rug— Baby on Peggy's lap — on, and off it too, for it was much too small to accomodate the whole of him; Hal on the floor beside her, his curly head leaning on his sister's shoulder in blissful and trustful content"

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"I can see it—I can see it! I can see my white house again, my dear little fairy house."

She would have stayed there gazing out contentedly half the morning if her little brothers had not called her back.

"Peggy," said Hal, plaintively, "do tum. Baby's pulling Hal's 'air adain."

"Peggy's coming, dear," said the motherly little voice.

And in another moment they were settled on the hearth-rug—Baby on Peggy's lap—on, and off it too, for it was much too small to accommodate the whole of him; Hal on the floor beside her, his curly head leaning on his sister's shoulder in blissful and trustful content.

CHAPTER II

THE WHITE SPOT ON THE HILL

"O reader! had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
O gentle reader! you would find
A tale in everything.
What more I have to say is short,
And you must kindly take it:
It is no tale; but, should you think,
Perhaps a tale you'll make it."

W. WORDSWORTH.

"TELLING stories," when the teller is only five and some months old, and the hearers one and a quarter and three, is rather a curious performance. But Peggy was well used to it, and when in good spirits quite able to battle with the difficulties of amusing Hal and Baby at the same time. And these difficulties were not small, for, compared with Baby, Hal was really "grown-up."

It is all very well for people who don't know much about tiny children to speak of them all

together, up to—six or seven, let us say—as "babies," but we who think we *do* know something about them, can assure the rest of the world that this is an immense mistake. One year in nursery arithmetic counts for ten or even more in *real* "grown-up" life. There was a great difference between Peggy and Hal for instance, but a still greater between Hal and Baby, and had there been a new baby below him again, of course it would have been the greatest of all. Peggy could not have explained this in words, but she knew it thoroughly all the same, and she had learnt to take it into account in her treatment of the two, especially in her stories telling. In reality the story itself was all for Hal, but there was a sort of running accompaniment for Baby which he enjoyed very much, and which, to tell the truth, I rather think Hal found amusing too, though he pretended it was for Baby's sake.

This morning her glance out of the window had made Peggy feel so happy that the story promised to be a great success. She sat still for a minute or two, her arms clasped round Baby's waist, gently rocking herself and him to and fro, while her gray eyes stared before her, as if reading stories in the carpet or on the wall.

"Peggy," said Hal at last, giving her a hug—he had been waiting what he thought a very long time —"Peggy, 'do on—no, I mean begin, p'ease."

"Yes, Hal, d'reckly," said Peggy. "It's coming, Hal, yes, now I think it's comed. Should we do piggies first, to please Baby before we begin?"

"Piggies is *so* silly," said Hal, disdainfully.

"Well, we'll kiss him instead—another kiss all together, he does so like that;" and when the kissing was over—"now, Baby dear, listen, and p'raps you'll understand *some*, and if you're good we'll have piggies soon."

Baby gave a kind of grunt; perhaps he was thinking of the pigs, but most likely it was just his way of saying he would be very good.

"There was onst," Peggy began, "a little girl who lived in a big house all by herself."

"Hadn't she no mamma, or nurse, or—or—brudders?" Hal interrupted.

"No, not none," Peggy went on. "She lived quite alone, and she didn't like it. The house was as big as a—as a church, and she hadn't no bed, and no chairs or tables, and there was very, *very* high stairs."

"Is there stairs in churches?" asked Hal.

Peggy looked rather puzzled.

"Yes, I think there is," she said. "There's people high up in churches, so there must be stairs. But I didn't say it *were* a church, Hal; I only said as big as a church. And the stairs was for Baby—you'll hear—p'raps there wasn't *reelly* stairs. Now, Baby one day a little piggy-wiggy came up the stairs—one, two, three," and Peggy's hand came creeping up Baby's foot and leg and across his pinafore and up his bare arm again, by way of illustrating piggy's progress, "and when he got to the top he said 'grumph,' and poked his nose into the little girl's neck"—here Peggy's own nose made a dive among Baby's double chins, to his exceeding delight, setting him off chuckling to himself for some time, which left Peggy free to go on with the serious part of the story for Hal's benefit—"and there was a window in the big house, and the little girl used to sit there always looking out."

"Always?" asked Hal again. "All night too? Didn't her ever go to bed?"

"She hadn't no bed, I told you. No, she didn't sit there all night, 'cos she couldn't have see'd in the dark. Never mind about the night. She sat there all day, always looking out, 'cos there was something

she liked to see. If I tell you you won't tell nobody what it was, will you, Hal?"

Hal looked very mystified, but replied obediently,

"No, won't tell nobody," he said.

"Well, then, I'll tell you what it was. It was a——" But at this moment Baby, having had enough of his own meditations, began to put in a claim to some special attention. The piggy had to be summoned and made to run up and down stairs two or three times before he would be satisfied and allow Peggy to proceed.

"Well, Peggy?" said Hal eagerly.

"It was a——" Oh dear, interrupted again! But this time the interruption was a blessing in disguise. It was nurse come to fetch Baby for his morning sleep.

"And thank you, Miss Peggy, my dear, for keeping him so nice and good. I heard you come up, and I knew they'd be all right with you," she said, as she walked away with Baby, who was by no means sure that he wanted to go.

"Now," said Hal, edging closer to Peggy, "we'll be comfable. Go on, Peggy—what she sawed."

"It was a hill—far, far away, neely as far as the sky," said Peggy, in a mysterious tone. "When the

sun comed she could see it plain—the hill and what was there, but when the sun goed she couldn't. There was a white spot on the hill, Hal, and that white spot was a lovely white cottage. She knowed it, though she'd never see'd it."

"How did she know it?"

"Her mam—no, that's wrong, she hadn't no mamma—well, never mind, *somebody* 'd told her."

"Were it *God?*" asked Hal, in an awestruck whisper.

"I don't know. No, I don't think so. I think it's a little naughty to say that, Hal. No, dear, don't cry," for signs of disturbance were visible in Hal's round face. "You didn't mean, and it isn't never naughty when we don't mean, you know. We'll go on about the little girl. She knowed it was a lovely cottage, and she wanted *very* much, as much as could be, to go there, for the big house wasn't pretty, and it was dark, nearly black, and the cottage was all white."

"Her house wasn't as nice as *zit*, were it? Zit house isn't b'ack," said Hal.

"No," said Peggy, doubtfully. "*It* wasn't as nice as this, but the white house was much prettier than this."

"How?" asked Hal.

"Oh!" said Peggy, letting her eyes and her fancy rove about together, "I think it was beautiful all over. It was all shiny white; the walls was white, and the carpets was white, and the tables and the chairs was white—all shiny and soft like—like——"

"Baby's best sash," suggested Hal.

"Well, p'raps—that'll do. And there was a cow and chickens and sheep, and a kitchen where you could make cakes, and a garden with lots of flowers and strawberries——"

"All white?" asked Hal.

"No, of course not. Strawberries couldn't be white, and flowers is all colours. 'Twas the *droind-room* that was all white."

"And the milk and the eggs. Zem *is* white," said Hal, triumphantly.

"Very well. I didn't say they wasn't. But the story goes on that the little girl didn't know how to get there; it was so far and so high up. So she sat and cried all alone at the window."

"All alone, *poor* little girl," said Hal, with deep feeling. "Kick, Peggy, kick, I'm 'doing to cry; make it come right *kick*. The crying's just coming."

"Make it wait a minute. I can't make it come

right all so quick," said Peggy. "It's going to come, so make the crying wait. One day she was crying d'edful, worst than never, 'cos the sun had goned, and she couldn't see the white cottage no more, and just then she heard something saying, 'mew, mew,' and it was a kitten outside the window, and it was just going to fall down and be killed."

"That's not coming right. I *must* cry," said Hal.

"But she opened the window—there now, you see—and she pulled the kitten in, so it didn't fall down, and it was so pleased it kissed her, and when it kissed her it turned into a fairy, and it touched her neck and made wings come, and then it opened the window again and flewed away with the little girl till they came to the white cottage, and then the little girl was quite happy for always."

"Did the fairy stay with her always?" asked Hal.

"No; fairies never does like that. They go back to fairyland. But the little girl had nice milk and eggs and cakes, and she made nosegays with the flowers, and the sun was *always* shining, so she was quite, *quite* happy."

"Her couldn't be happy all alone," said Hal. "I don't like zat story, Peggy. You haven't made it nice at all. It's a nonsense story."

Hal wriggled about and seemed very cross. Poor Peggy was not so much indignant as distressed at failing in her efforts to amuse him. What was the matter? It couldn't be that he was getting sleepy —it was far too early for his morning sleep.

"It isn't a nonsense story," she said, and she glanced towards the window as she spoke. Yes, the sun was shining brightly, the morning clouds had quite melted away; it was going to be a fine day after all. And clear and white gleamed out the spot on the distant hill which Peggy loved to gaze at! "Come here, Hal," she said, getting on to her feet and helping Hal on to his, "come with me to the window and you'll see if it's a nonsense story. Only you've never to tell nobody. It's Peggy's own secret."

Hal forgot his crossness in a minute; he felt so proud and honoured. Peggy led him to the window. It was not a very pretty prospect; they looked out on to a commonplace street, houses on both sides, though just opposite there was a little variety in the shape of an old-fashioned, smoke-dried garden. Beyond that again, more houses, more streets, stretching away out into suburbs, and somewhere beyond all that again the mysterious, beautiful, enchanting

'And above the tops of all the houses, clear though faint, was now to be seen the outline of a range of hills, so softly gray-blue in the distance that but for the irregular line never changing in its form, one could easily have fancied it was only the edge of a quickly passing ridge of clouds. Peggy, however, knew better.

"See, Hal," she said, "over there, far, far away, *really* in the sky, does you see that bluey hill?" '

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region which the children spoke of and believed in as "the country," not really so far off after all, though to them it seemed so.

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"See, Hal," she said, "over there, far, far away, *neely* in the sky, does you see that bluey hill?"

Of course he saw, agreeing so readily that Peggy was sure he did not distinguish rightly, which was soon proved to be the case by his announcing that "The 'ill were sailing away."

"No, no, it isn't," Peggy cried. "You've mustooked a cloud, Hal. See now," and by bringing her own eyes exactly on a level with a certain spot on the glass she was able to place his correctly, 'just over that little bubble in the window you can see it. Its top goes up above the bubble and then down and then up again, and it never moves like the clouds—does you see now, Hallie dear?"

"Zes, zes," said Hal, "but it's a *wenny* little 'ill, Peggy."

"No, dear," his sister explained. "It only looks little 'cos it's so far away. *You* is too little to understand, dear, but it's true that it's a big hill, neely a mounting, Hal. Mamma told me."

"Oh," said Hal, profoundly impressed and quite convinced.

"Mountings is *old* hills, or big hills," Peggy continued, herself slightly confused. "I don't know if they is the papas and mammas of the little ones, but I think it's something like that, for onst in church I heard the clergymunt read that the little hills jumped for joy, so they must be the children. I'll ask mamma, and then I'll tell you. I'm not quite sure if he meaned the same kind, for these hills never jumps—that's how mamma told me to know they wasn't clouds."

"Zes," said Hal, "but go on about the secret, Peggy. Hal doesn't care about the 'ills."

"But the secret's *on* the hills," replied Peggy. "Look more, Hal—does you see a teeny, *teeny* white spot on the bluey hill? Higher up than the bubble, but not at the top quite?"

Hal's eyes were good and his faith was great.

"Zes, zes," he cried. "I does see it—kite plain, Peggy."

"Well, Hallie," Peggy continued, "*that's* my secret."

"Is it the fairy cottage, and is the little girl zere now?" Hal asked, breathlessly.

Peggy hesitated.

"It is a white cottage," she said. "Mamma told me. She looked at it through a seeing pipe."

"What's a seeing pipe?" Hal interrupted.

"I can't tell you just now. Ask mamma to show you hers some day. It's too difficult to understand, but it makes you see things plain. And mamma found out it was reelly a cottage, a white cottage, all alone up on the hill—isn't it sweet of it to be there all alone, Hallie? And she said I might think it was a fairy cottage and keep it for my own secret, only I've telled you, Hal, and you mustn't tell nobody."

"And is it all like Baby's best sash, and are there cakes and f'owers and cows?" asked Hal.

"I don't know. I made up the story, you know, Hal, to please you. I've made lots—mamma said I might. But I've never see'd the cottage, you know. I *daresay* it's beautiful, white and gold like the story,

that's why I said it. It does so shine when the sun's on it—look, look, Hal!"

For as she spoke the sunshine had broken out again more brilliantly; and the bright, thin sparkle which often dazzles one between the showers in unsettled weather, lighted up that quarter of the sky where the children were gazing, and, to their fancy at least, the white spot caught and reflected the rays.

"Oh zes, I see," Hal repeated. "But, Peggy, I'd like to *go* zere and to see it. Can't we go, Peggy? It would be so nice, nicer than making up stories. And do you think—oh do you think, Peggy, that p'raps there's *pigs* zere, real pigs?"

He clasped his hands entreatingly as he spoke. Peggy must say there were pigs. Poor Peggy—it was rather a comedown after her fairy visions. But she was too kind to say anything to vex Hal.

"I thought you said pigs was silly," she objected, gently.

"Playing pigs to make Baby laugh is silly," said Hal, "and pigs going to market and stayin' at 'ome and roast beefin', is *d'edful* silly. But not real pigs."

"Oh well, then, *you* may think pigs if you like," said Peggy. "I don't think I will, but that doesn't

matter. You may have them in the cottage if you like, only you mustn't tell Thor and Terry and Baldwin about it."

"I won't tell, on'y you *might* have them too," said Hal discontentedly. "You're not kind, Peggy."

"Don't let's talk about the cottage any more, then," said Peggy, though her own eyes were fixed on the far-off white spot as she spoke. "I think p'raps, Hallie, you're *rather* too little to care about it."

"I'm not," said Hal, "and I do care. But I do like pigs, real pigs. I sawed zem in the country."

"You can't remember," said Peggy. "It's two whole years since we was in the real country, Hallie, and you're only three and a half. I know it's two years. I heard mamma say so to papa, so you wasn't two then."

"But I did see zem and I do 'amember, 'cos of pictures," said Hal.

"Oh yes, dear, there is pictures of pigs in your scrap-book, I know," Peggy agreed. "You get it now and we'll look for them."

Off trotted Hal, returning in a minute with his book, and for a quarter of an hour or so his patient little sister managed to keep him happy and amused

At the end of that time, however, he began to be cross and discontented again. Peggy did not know what to make of him this morning, he was not often so difficult to please. She was very glad when nurse came in to say it was now *his* time for his morning sleep, and though Hal grumbled and scolded and said he was not sleepy she carried him off, and Peggy was left in peace.

She was not at a loss to employ herself. At half-past eleven she usually went down to mamma for an hour's lessons, and it must be nearly that time now. She got her books together and sat looking over the one verse she had to learn, her thoughts roving nevertheless in the direction they loved best—away over the chimneys and the smoke; away, away, up, up to the fairy cottage on the distant hill.

CHAPTER III

"THE CHILDREN AT THE BACK"

"It seems to me if I'd money enough,
My heart would be made of different stuff;
I would think about those whose lot is rough."

MRS. HAWTREY.

THESE children's home was not in a very pretty place. In front, as I have told you, it looked out on to a rather ugly street, and there were streets and streets beyond that again—streets of straight, stiff, grim-looking houses, some large and some small, but all commonplace and dull. And in and out between these bigger streets were narrower and still uglier ones, scarcely indeed to be called streets, so dark and poky were they, so dark and poky were the poor houses they contained.

The street immediately behind the children's house, that on to which its back windows looked out, was one of these poorer ones, though not by any means one of the most miserable. And ugly though

it was, Peggy was very fond of gazing out of the night nursery window on to this street, especially on days when it was "no use," as she called it to herself, looking out at the front; that meant, as I daresay you can guess, days on which it was too dull and cloudy to see the distant hills, and above all the white spot, which had taken such hold on her fancy. For she had found out some very interesting things in that dingy street. Straight across from the night nursery window was a very queer miserable sort of a shop, kept by an old Irishwoman whose name was Mrs. Whelan. It is rather absurd to call it a shop, though it was a place where things were bought and sold, for the room in which these buyings and sellings went on was Mrs. Whelan's kitchen, and bedroom, and sitting-room, and wash-house, as well as her shop! It was on the first floor, and you got up to it by a rickety staircase—more like a ladder indeed than a staircase, and underneath it on the ground-floor lived a cobbler, with whom Mrs. Whelan used to quarrel at least once a day, though as he was a patient, much enduring man, the quarrels never went farther than the old Irishwoman's opening her window and shouting down all manner of scoldings to the poor fellow, of which he took no notice.

"She was rather a terrible-looking old woman; she always wore a short bed-gown, that is a loose kind of jacket roughly drawn in at the waist, of washed out cotton, which never looked clean, and yet somehow never seemed to get much dirtier, a black stuff petticoat, and a cap with flapping frills which quite hid her face unless you were very near her, and she was generally to be seen with a pipe in her mouth. Her voice was both loud and shrill, and when she was in a temper you could almost hear what she said, though the nursery window was shut." P.35.

On Sundays the cobbler used to tidy himself up and go off to church "like a gentleman," the boys said. But Mrs. Whelan, alas, never tidied herself up, and never went to church, and though she made a great show of putting a shutter across that part of the window which showed "the shop," nurse had more than once shaken her head when the children were dressing for church, and told them not to look over the way, she was sadly afraid the shutting or shuttering up was all a pretence, and that Mrs. Whelan made a good penny by her Sunday sales of tobacco and pipes to the men, or maybe of sugar, candles, or matches to careless housekeepers who had let their stock run out too late on Saturday night.

She was rather a terrible-looking old woman; she always wore a short bed-gown, that is, a loose kind of jacket roughly drawn in at the waist, of washed-out cotton, which never looked clean, and yet somehow never seemed to get much dirtier, a black stuff petticoat, and a cap with flapping frills which quite hid her face unless you were very near her, and she was generally to be seen with a pipe in her mouth. Her voice was both loud and shrill, and when she was in a temper you could almost hear what she said, though the nursery window was shut. All the

neighbours were afraid of her, and in consequence treated her with great respect. But like most people in this world, she had some good about her, as you will hear.

Good or bad, the children, Peggy especially, found Mrs. Whelan very interesting. Peggy had never seen her nearer than from the window, and though she had a queer sort of wish to visit the shop and make closer acquaintance with the old crone, she was far too frightened of her to think of doing so really. The boys, however, had been several times inside Mrs. Whelan's dwelling, and used to tell wonderful stories of the muddle of things it contained, and of the old woman herself. They always bought their soap-bubble pipes there, "three a penny," and would gladly have bought some of the toffee-balls and barley-sugar which were also to be had, if this had not been strictly forbidden by mamma, in spite of their grumbling.

"It isn't so *very* dirty, mamma," they said, "and you get a lot more for a penny than in a proper shop."

But mamma would not give in. She knew what Mrs. Whelan was like, as she used sometimes to go over herself to talk to the poor old woman, but that, of course, was a different matter.

"I don't much like your going there at all," she would say, "but it pleases her for us to buy some trifles now and then."

But in her heart she wished very much that they were not obliged to live in this dreary and ugly town, where their poor neighbours were rarely the sort of people she could let her children know anything of. Mamma, in *her* childhood, had lived in that fairyland she called "the country," and so had papa, and they still looked forward to being there again, though for the present they were obliged to make the best of their home in a dingy street.

It seemed much less dull and dingy to the children than to them, however. Indeed I don't think the children ever thought about it at all. The boys were busy at school, and found plenty of both work and play to make the time pass quickly, and Peggy, who might perhaps have been a little dull and lonely in her rather shut-up life, had her fancies and her wonders—her interesting things to look at both at the front and the back of the house, and mamma to tell all about them to! And this reminds me that I have not yet told you what it was she was *most* fond of watching from the night nursery window. It was not Mrs. Whelan or the cobbler; it was the

tenants of the third or top story of the rickety old house—the family she always spoke of to herself as "the children at the back."

Such a lot of them there were. It was long before Peggy was able to distinguish them "all from each other," as she said, and it took her longer still to make names by which she could keep a clear list in her head. The eldest looked to her quite grown-up, though in reality she was about thirteen; she was a big red-cheeked girl, though she lived in a town; her arms were red too, poor thing, especially in winter, for they were seldom or never covered, and she seemed to be always at work, scrubbing or washing, or running out to fetch two or three of the little ones in from playing in the gutter. Peggy called her "Reddy," and though it was the girl's red cheeks and arms which made her first choose the name, in a while she came to think of it as meaning "ready" also, for Peggy did not know much about spelling as yet, and the thought in her mind of the look of the two words was the same. For a good while Peggy fancied that Reddy was the nurse or servant of the family, but one day when she said something of the kind to her own nurse she was quickly put right.

"Their servant, my dear! Bless you, no. How

could they afford to keep a servant; they've hard enough work to keep themselves, striving folk though they seem. There's such a many of them, you see, and mostly so little—save that big girl and the sister three below her, there's none really to help the mother. And the cripple must be a great charge."

"What's the cripple, nursey?" Peggy asked.

"Why, Miss Peggy, haven't you noticed the white-faced girl on crutches? You must have seen her dragging up and down in front of the house of a fine day."

"Oh yes," said Peggy, "but I didn't know that was called cripple. And she's quite little; she's as little as me, nurse!"

"She's older than she looks, poor thing," said nurse—"maybe oldest of them all."

This, however, Peggy could not believe. She fixed in her own mind that "Crippley" came after the two boys who were evidently next to Reddy—she did not give the boys names, for they did not interest her as much as the girls. Having so many brothers of her own and no sister, it seemed to her as if a sister must be the very nicest thing in the world, and of all the children at the back, the two that she liked most to watch were a pair of little

girls about three years older than herself, whom she named "The Smileys," "Brown Smiley" and "Light Smiley" when she thought of them separately, for though they were very like each other, the colour of their hair was different. They were very jolly little girls, poorly clad and poorly fed though they were, taking life easily, it seemed—too easily in the opinion of their eldest sister Reddy, and the sister next above them—between them and Crippley, according to Peggy's list. This sister was the only one whose real name Peggy knew, by hearing it so frequently shouted after her by the mother and Reddy. For this child, "Mary-Hann," was rather deaf, though it was not till long afterwards that Peggy found this out.

"Mary-Hann" was a patient stupid sort of girl, a kind of second in command to Reddy, and she was like Reddy in appearance, except that she was several sizes smaller and thinner, so that even supposing that her arms were as red as her sister's they did not strike one in the same way.

Below the Smileys came another boy, who was generally to be seen in their company, and who, according to Peggy, rejoiced in the name of "Tip." And below Tip were a few babies, in reality I

believe never more than three, during the years through which their little over-the-way neighbour watched them. But even she was obliged to give up hopes of classifying the babies, for there always seemed to be *a* baby about the same age, and one or two others just struggling into standing or rather tumbling alone, and for ever being picked up by Reddy or her attendant sprite Mary-Hann.

Such were Peggy's "children at the back." And many a dull day when it was too rainy to go a walk, and too cloudy to be "any use" to gaze out at the front of the house, did these poor children, little as they guessed it, help to make pass more quickly and pleasantly for the sisterless maiden. Many a morning when Hal and Baby were asleep and nurse was glad to have an hour or so for a bit of ironing, or some work of the kind down in the kitchen—for my Peggy's papa and mamma were not rich and could not keep many servants, so that nurse, though she was plain and homely in her ways, was of far more use than a smarter young woman to them—many a morning did the little girl, left in the night nursery in charge of her sleeping brothers, take up her stand at the window which overlooked Mrs. Whelan's and the cobbler and the Smileys with all

their brothers and sisters. There was always something new to see or to ask nurse to explain afterwards. For ever so long it took up Peggy's thoughts, and gave much conversation in the nursery to "plan" how the ten or eleven children, not to speak of the papa and mamma, *could* all find place in two rooms. It kept Peggy awake at night, especially if the weather happened to be at all hot or close, to think how *very* uncomfortable poor Reddy and Crippley and Mary-Hann and the Smileys must be, all sleeping in one bed as nurse said was too probably the case. And it was the greatest relief to her mind, and to nurse's too, I do believe, to discover by means of some cautious inquiries of the cobbler when nurse took him over some of the boys' boots to mend, that the family was not so short of space as they had feared.

"They've two other rooms, Miss Peggy, as doesn't show to the front," said nurse, "two attics with sloping windows in the roof to their back again. And they're striving folk, he says, as indeed any one may see for theirselves."

"Then how shall we plan it now, I wonder," said Peggy, looking across to the Smileys' mansion with new respect. But nurse had already left the room,

and perhaps, now she was satisfied their neighbours were not quite so much to be pitied, would scarcely have had patience to listen to Peggy's "wonderings" about them. So the little girl went on to herself—

"I should think the downstairs room is the papa's and mamma's and the teeniest baby's, and perhaps Crippley sleeps there, as she's ill, like me when I had the hooping-cough and I couldn't sleep and mamma kept jumping up to me. And then the big boys and Tip has one room—'ticks,' nurse calls the rooms with windows in the roof. I think I'd like to sleep in a 'tick' room; you must see the stars so plain without getting up; and—and—let me see, Reddy and Mary-Hann and the Smileys and the old babies—no, that's too many—and I don't know how many old babies there is. We'll say *one* —if there's another it must be a boy and go in the boys' tick—and that makes Reddy and Mary——"

"Miss Peggy, your mamma's ready for your lessons," came the housemaid's voice at the door, and Peggy hurried off. But she was rather in a brown study at her lessons that morning. Mamma could not make her out at all, till at last she shut up the books for a minute and made Peggy tell her where her thoughts were wool-gathering.

"Not so very far away, mamma dear," said Peggy, laughing. She never could help laughing when mamma said "funny things like that." "Not so very far away. I was only wondering about the children at the back."

She called them always "the children at the back" when she spoke of them—for even to mamma she would have felt shy of telling her own names for them. And then she went on to repeat what nurse had heard from the cobbler. Mamma agreed that it was very interesting, and she too was pleased to think "the children at the back's house," as Peggy called it, was more commodious than might have been expected. But still, even such interesting things as that must not be allowed to interfere with lessons, Peggy must put it all out of her head till they were done with, and then mamma would talk about it with her.

"Only, mamma," said Peggy, "I don't know what com—commo—that long word you said, means."

"I should not have used it, perhaps," said mamma. "And yet I don't know. If we only used the words you understand already, you would never learn new ones—eh, Peggy! Commodious just means large, and not narrow and squeezed up."

Peggy nodded her head, which meant that she quite understood, and then the lessons went on smoothly again.

When they were over, mamma talked about poor people, especially about poor children, to Peggy, and explained to her more than she had ever done before about what being poor really means. It made Peggy feel and look rather sad, and once or twice mamma was afraid she was going to cry, which, of course, she did not wish her to do. But Peggy choked down the crying feeling, because she knew it would make her mother sorry and would not do the poor people any good.

"Mamma," she said, "it *neely* makes me cry, but I won't. But when I'm big can't I do something for the children at the back?"

"They won't be children then, Peggy dear. You may be able to do something for them without waiting for that. I'll think about it. I don't fancy they are so *very* poor. As I have been telling you, there are many far poorer. But I daresay they have very few pleasures in their lives. We might try to think of a little sunshine for them now and then."

"The Smile——" began Peggy, but she stopped suddenly, growing red—"the littler ones do play a good

deal in the gutter, mamma dear," she said, anxious to state things quite fairly; "but I don't think that's *very* nice play, and the sun very seldom shines there. And Red—the big ones, mamma dear, and the one that goes on—I can't remember the name of those sticks."

"Crutches," said mamma.

"Yes, crutches—*her* never has no plays at all, I don't think. She'd have more sunshine at the 'nother side of our house, mamma dear."

Mamma smiled. Peggy did not understand that mamma did not mean "sunshine" exactly as she took it; she forgot, too, that of actual sunshine more fell on the back street than she thought of. For it was only on dull or rainy days that she looked out much on the children at the back. On fine days her eyes were busy in another direction.

"I'll think about it," said mamma. So Peggy for the present was satisfied.

This talk about the Smileys and the rest of them had been a day or two before the morning on which we first saw Peggy—the morning that Thor tried so to make fun of her about choosing sugar in her bread and milk, because it was cold. Mamma had not said any more about the children at the back,

and this particular morning Peggy herself was not thinking very much about them. Her head was running a good deal on the white cottage and all her fancies about it, and she was feeling rather disappointed that she had not succeeded better in amusing Hal by her stories.

"It must be, I suppose," she said to herself, "that he's rather too little for that kind of fancy stories. I wonder if Baldwin would like them; it would be nice to have somebody to make fancies with me."

But somehow Baldwin and the fairy cottage did not seem to match. And Thor and Terry were both much too big—Thor would laugh at her, and Terry would think it waste of time; he had so many other things to amuse himself about. No, Peggy could not think of any one who would "understand," she decided, with a sigh!

CHAPTER IV

"REAL" FANCIES

"Mine be a cot beside the hill."
SAMUEL ROGERS.

JUST then came the usual summons to her lessons. Mamma was waiting for her little girl in the corner of the drawing-room, where she always sat when she was teaching Peggy. It was a very nice corner, near the fire, for though it was not winter it was rather chilly, and mamma often felt cold. Thor used to tell her that she should take a good run or have a game of cricket to warm her; it would be much better than sitting near the fire. Peggy thought it was rather unkind of Thor to say so, but mamma only laughed at him, so perhaps it was just his boy way of speaking.

Peggy said her lessons quite well, but she looked rather grave; no smiles lighted up her face, and

when lessons were over she sat still without speaking, and seemed as if she scarcely knew what she wanted to do with herself.

"Is there anything the matter, dear?" mamma asked.

"I'm rather tired, I think, mamma," Peggy replied.

"Tired!" mamma repeated, in some surprise. It wasn't often that Peggy talked of being tired. "What is that with? You've not been worrying yourself about the children who live over Mrs. Whelan's, I hope? You mustn't do that, you know, dear; it would do you harm and them no good."

For mamma knew that Peggy sometimes did "worry" about things—"Once she takes a thing in her head she'll work herself up so, for all she seems so quiet," nurse would say.

"No, mamma dear," Peggy replied; "I'm not tired because of that. I like thinking about the children at the back. I wish——"

"What?" said mamma.

"I wish I'd sisters like them. I'm rather lonely, mamma. I do think God might have gaved *one* sister to Peggy, and not such a great lot to the children at the back."

"But you have your brothers, my dear little girl. You might have been an only child."

"The big ones is always neely at school, and Hal's too little to understand. It's Hal that's tired me, mamma dear. He was so d'edfully cross afore nurse put him to bed."

"Cross, was he?" said mamma. "I'm afraid he must be getting those last teeth. He may be cross for some time; if so, it would not do to leave him." She seemed to be speaking to herself, but when she caught sight of Peggy's puzzled face she stopped. "Tell me about Hal, dear," she went on. "What was it that tired you so?"

"I was trying to amuse him and tell him stories about my white cottage up on the hill, and he was so cross. He couldn't understand, and he said they was 'nonsense' stories."

"He is too little, perhaps, to care for fancies," said her mother, consolingly. "You must wait till he is a little older, Peggy dear."

"But when he's older he'll be a *boy*, mamma," said Peggy; "he'll be like Thor and Terry, who don't care for things like that, or Baldwin, who thinks stories stupid. Oh, mamma, I wish I had a sister. *That's* what I want," she added, with conviction.

Mamma smiled.

"Poor Peggy," she said. "I'm afraid it can't be helped. You can never have a sister near your own age, and I'm afraid a baby sister, even if you had one, would be no good."

"Oh no, we've had enough babies," said Peggy, decidedly. "But, mamma, mightn't there be some little girl who'd play with me like a sister? If there *is* a fairy living in that cottage, mamma, how I do wish she would find a little girl for me!"

Mamma looked a very little bit troubled.

"Peggy dear," she said, "you mustn't let your fancies run away with you too far. I told you they would do you no harm if you kept plain in your head that they *were* fancies, but you mustn't forget that. You know there couldn't really be a fairy living in that little white cottage."

"No," Peggy agreed, "I know that, mamma, because fairies *really* live in fairyland."

She looked up gravely into her mother's face as she said so. Mamma could not help laughing.

"Fairies *really*," she said, "live in Peggy's funny little head, and in many other funny little heads, I have no doubt. But nowhere——"

"Mamma, mamma," Peggy interrupted, putting

her fingers in her ears as she spoke, "I *won't* listen. You mustn't, mustn't say that. I must have my fairies, mamma. I've no sisters."

"Well, keep them in fairyland then, or at least only let them out for visits now and then. But don't mix them up with real things too much, or you will get quite a confusion, and never be sure if you're awake or dreaming."

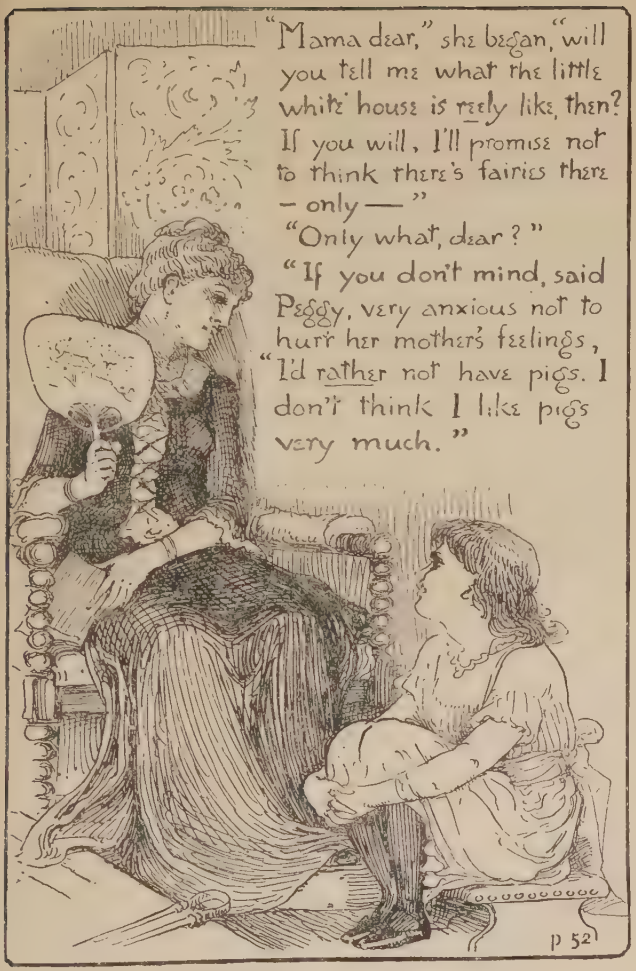
Peggy seemed to consider this over very seriously. After a minute or too she lifted her face again, and looked straight into her mother's with her earnest gray eyes.

"Mamma dear," she began, "will you tell me what the little white house is *reely* like, then? If you will, I'll promise not to think there's fairies there—only——"

"Only what, dear?"

"If you don't mind," said Peggy, very anxious not to hurt her mother's feelings, "I'd *rather* not have pigs. I don't think I like pigs very much."

"Well, we needn't have pigs then. But remember I can only 'fancy' it. I've never seen that particular cottage, you see, Peggy. But I have seen other cottages in Brackenshire, and so I can fancy what it *most likely* is. You see there are different kinds of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fancying—there's fancying that is all fancy, like fairy stories, and there's fancying that might be true and real, and that very likely is true and real. Do ou understand?"

"Yes," said Peggy, drawing a deep breath. "Well, mamma, go on real-fancying, please. What's that place you've been at—Brat—what is it?"

"Brackenshire,' mamma replied. "That's the name of that part of the country that we see far off, from the windows upstairs."

"And is all the cottages white there, and is they *very* pretty?" asked Peggy, with deep interest. "Oh, mamma, do tell me, quick."

"I don't know if they're all white, but I think they are mostly. And there are some pretty and some ugly. Of course it depends a good deal upon the people that live in them. If they're nice, clean, busy people, who like their house to be neat and pretty, and work hard to keep it so, of course it's much more likely to be so than if they were careless and lazy."

"Oh," said Peggy, clasping her hands. "I do so hope my cottage has nice people living in it. I *think* it has, don't you, mamma? It looks *so* white."

"My dear Peggy," said mamma, smiling, "we

can't tell, when it's so far away. But we may hope so."

"Yes," said Peggy, "we'll hope so, and we'll think so." But then a rather puzzled look came over her face again, though she smiled too. "Mamma," she went on, "there's such a funny thing come into my head, only I don't know quite how to say it. I think that the far-away helps to make it pretty—why is far-away so pretty, mamma?"

Mamma smiled again.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you why. Wouldn't it spoil some things if we knew the why of them, little Peggy?"

Peggy did not answer. This was another new thought for her, and rather a difficult one. She put it away in her mind, in one of the rather far back cupboards there, and locked it up, to think about it afterwards.

"Mamma," she said, coaxingly, "I want you to tell me a real fancy about the cottage. It will be so nice when I look at it to think it's most likely *reely* like that."

"Well, then, let us see," mamma began.

"Wait just one minute, mamma dear, till I've shut my eyes. First I must get the bluey hills and

the white spot into them, and then I'll shut them and see what you tell. Yes—that's all right now."

So mamma went on.

"I fancy a cottage on the side of a hill. The cottage is white, of course, and the hill is green. Not very green—a kind of brown-green, for the grass is short and close, nibbled by the sheep and cows that find their living on the hill most of the year. The cottage is very white, for last summer it had a nice wash all over, and that lasts clean a good while in the country. There is a little low wall round it shutting it in from the hillside, and this wall is not very white, though it once was so, for it is covered with creeping plants, so that you can scarcely see what its own colour is. At the front of the house there is a little garden, quite a tiny one—there are potatoes and gooseberry bushes and cabbages at one side, but in front of them are some nice old-fashioned flowers, and at the other side there are strawberry plants, and behind them some rose-bushes. In summer I am sure there will be some pretty roses."

"Oh how nice," said Peggy; "go on, go on, please."

"There is a funny little wooden shed behind the house, leaning against the wall, which has a door big enough for a child to go in by, or a big person if

they stooped down very much, and besides this it has a *very* little door in the wall, leading on to the hill-side. Can you guess what the shed is for, Peggy, and what the tiny door is for?"

Peggy thought and thought, but her country knowledge was but scanty.

"I can't think," she said. "It couldn't be for pigs, 'cos there isn't any in the cottage. Nor it couldn't be for cows, 'cos cows is so big."

"What should you say to cocks and hens, Peggy? There are to be fresh eggs there, aren't there? And chickens sometimes. I rather think they take eggs and chickens to market, don't they?"

"Oh yes, I'm sure they do. How stupid I am! Of course the little wooden house is for cocks and hens. You're making it lovelily, mamma. What is it like inside, and who lives in it? I do so want to know."

"Inside?" said mamma. "I'm almost afraid you might be disappointed, Peggy, if you've never been in a real cottage. There are so many that look very pretty outside and are not at all pretty inside. But at least we may think it is neat and clean. There are only two rooms, Peggy—a kitchen which you go straight into, and another room which opens out of

it. The kitchen is very bright and pleasant; there is a table before the window with some flower-pots on it, in which both winter and summer there are plants growing. There is a large cupboard of dark old wood standing against the wall, and a sort of sofa that is called a settle with cushions covered with red cotton, standing near the fireplace. There are shelves, too, on which stand some dishes and two or three shining pots and pans, the ugly black ones are kept in a little back kitchen where most of the cooking is done, so that the front kitchen should be kept as nice as possible."

"That makes another room, mamma dear. You said there was only two."

"Oh, but it's so very tiny you couldn't call it a room. The second room is a bedroom, but the best pieces of furniture are kept there. There is a nice chest of drawers and a rocking-chair, and there is a very funny wooden cradle, standing right down on the floor, not at all like Baby's cot. And in this cradle is a nice, fat, bright-eyed little baby."

"A baby," said Peggy, doubtfully.

"Yes, to be sure. There's always a baby in a cottage, unless you'd rather have a very old couple

whose babies are grown-up men and women, out in the world."

"No," said Peggy, "I don't want that. A very old woman in a cottage would be *razer* like a witch, or else it could make me think of Red Riding-Hood's grandmother, and that is *so* sad. No, I don't mind the baby if it has a nice mamma—but only one baby, pelease, mamma dear. I don't want *lots*, like the children at the back, they're always tumbling about and sc'eaming so."

"Oh no, we won't have it like that. We'll only have one baby—a very contented nice baby, and its mamma is very nice too. She's got quite a pretty rosy face, and she stands at the door every morning to see her husband go off to his work, and every evening to watch for him coming back again, and she holds the baby up in her arms and it laughs and crows."

"Yes," said Peggy, "that'll do. And the eggs and the chickens, mamma?"

"Oh yes, she takes great care of the cocks and hens, and never forgets to go outside the garden to feed them on the hill, and in the evening they all come home of themselves through the little door in the wall. There's a very nice cat in the cottage too;

it sits purring on the front steps on fine days, as if it thought the cottage and garden and everything else belonged to it. And——"

But suddenly the clock struck. Up started mamma.

"Peggy, darling, I had no idea it was so late. And I have to go out the moment after luncheon, and I have still two letters to write. I am a greater baby than any of you! Run off, dear, and tell nurse I want to speak to her before I go out."

"And to-morrow," said Peggy, "to-morrow, will you tell me some more about the white cottage, mamma? It *is* so nice—I don't think you're a baby at all, mamma. A baby couldn't make it up so lovelily."

And Peggy set off upstairs in great content. The white spot would give her more pleasure than ever, now that she knew what sort of *real* fancies to have about it.

"And to-morrow," she said to herself, "to-morrow mamma will tell me more, lots more. If I say my lessons very goodly, p'raps mamma will tell me some more every day. And p'raps Hallie would like those kinds better than about fairies, and wouldn't call *them* nonsense stories."

Poor little Peggy—"to-morrow" brought news which put her pretty fancies about the white cottage out of her head for a while.

She gave her mother's message to nurse, and after dinner nurse went downstairs. When she came up again she looked rather grave, and Peggy thought perhaps she was unhappy about Hal, who was still cross and had bright red spots on his cheeks.

"Does you think poor Hallie is ill, nurse?" asked Peggy in a low voice, for Hal not to hear.

"No, my dear, it's only his teeth. But they'll make him fractious for a while, I'm afraid, and he's not a very strong child, not near so strong as Baby and the big boys."

"Poor Hallie," said Peggy, with great sympathy. "I'll be very good to him even if he is very cross, nurse."

Nurse did not answer for a minute, and she still looked very grave.

"Why do you look so sad, nurse, if it isn't about Hal?" asked Peggy, impatiently.

"Did I look sad, Miss Peggy? I didn't know it. I was thinking about some things your mamma was speaking of to me."

"Oh!" said Peggy, "was it about our new frocks?

Mamma and you is always very busy when we need new frocks, I know."

"Yes, dear," said nurse, but that was all.

Then Peggy and Hal and nurse and Baby went out for a walk. They did not go very far, for it was what nurse called a queer-tempered day. Between the gleams of blue sky and sunshine there came sharp little storms and showers. It was April weather, though April had not yet begun.

"Which way are we going?" Peggy asked, as they set off, she and Hal hand-in-hand, just in front of nurse and the perambulator. She *hoped* nurse would say "up Fernley Road," because Fernley Road led straight on towards the hills—so at least it seemed to Peggy. Their street ran into Fernley Road at one end, so that Fernley Road was what is called at right angles with it, and Peggy felt sure that if you walked far enough along the road you *could* not but come to "the beginning of the hills."

But to-day Peggy was to be disappointed.

"We can't go far, Miss Peggy, and we must go to Field's about Master Hal's new boots. It looks as if it might rain, so perhaps we'd better go straight there. You know the way, Miss Peggy?—right on to the end of this street and then turn to the left."

Peggy gave a little sigh, but trotted on quietly. Hal began grumbling.

"What is I to have new boots for?" he said. "I doesn't want new boots."

"Oh, Hal," said Peggy, "I think it's very nice indeed to have new boots. They shine so, and sometimes they do make such a lovely squeaking."

But Hal wasn't in a humour to be pleased with anything, so Peggy tried to change the subject.

"Nurse says we are to turn to the left at the end of this street," she said. "Does you know which is the left, Hal? *I* do, 'cos of my pocket in my frock. First I feel for my pocket, and when it's there I say 'all right,' and then I know that's the right, and when it isn't there I *can't* say 'all right,' and so I know the side it isn't at is the left."

Hal listened with some interest, but a slight tinge of contempt for feminine garments.

"Boys has pockets at each sides, so all boys' sides is right," he said.

But Peggy was by this time in the midst of her researches for her pocket, so she did not argue the point.

"Here it is!" she exclaimed, "all right, so the nother side is left. *This* way, Hallie," and very

proud to show nurse that she had understood her directions, she led her little brother down the street into which they had now turned.

There were shops in this street, which made it more amusing than the one in which the children lived, even though they had seen them so often that they knew pretty well all that was worth looking at in the windows—that is to say, in the picture-shops and the toy-shops, and perhaps in the confectioner's. All others were passed by as a matter of course. Field's, the shoemaker's, was not quite so stupid as some, because under a glass shade, in the midst of all the real boots and shoes, were half a dozen pairs of dolls' ones, which Peggy thought quite lovely, though apparently no one else was of her opinion, as the tiny things stayed there day after day without a single pair being sold. Peggy herself could remember them for what seemed to her a very long time, and Baldwin, who owned to having admired them when he was "little," assured her they had been there since she was quite a baby; he could remember having "run on" to look at them in the days when he and Terry had trotted in front and nurse had perambulated Peggy behind.

The little boots and shoes came into Peggy's mind

just now, partly perhaps because Hal was hanging back so, and she was afraid he would be cross if she asked him to walk quicker.

"Let's run on and look at the tiny shoes in Field's window," she said. "We can wait there till nurse comes up to us. She'll see us."

This roused Hal to bestir himself, and they were soon at the shoemaker's.

"*Isn't* they sweet?" said Peggy. "If I had a gold pound of my very own, Hal, I'd buy some of them."

"Would you?" said Hal, doubtfully. "No, if *I* had a gold pound I'd——"

But just then nurse came up to them and they were all marched into the shop.

CHAPTER V

THE LITTLE RED SHOES

"Pif-paf Pottrie, what trade are you? Are you a tailor?"
"Better still!" "A shoemaker?"

BROTHERS GRIMM.

THERE was another reason why the children liked Field's shop. At the back of it was a sort of little room railed off by a low wooden partition with curtains at the top, into which customers were shown to try on and be fitted with new boots or shoes. This little room within a room had always greatly taken Peggy's fancy; she had often talked it over with her brothers, and wished they could copy it in their nursery. Inside it had comfortable cushioned seats all round, making it look like one of the large, square, cushioned pews still to be found in some old churches, pews which all children who have ever sat in them dearly love.

There was always some excitement in peeping

into this little room to see if any one was already there; if that were the case the children knew they should have to be "tried on" in the outer shop. To-day, however, there was no doubt about the matter—Miss Field, who acted as her father's shop-woman, marshalled them all straight into the curtained recess without delay; there was no one there—and when Peggy and Hal had with some difficulty twisted themselves on to the seats with as much formality as if they were settling themselves in church, and nurse had explained what they had come for, the girl began operations by taking off one of Hal's boots to serve as a pattern for his size.

"The same make as these, I suppose?" she asked.

"No, miss, a little thicker, I think. They're to be good strong ones for country wear," said nurse.

Peggy looked up with surprise.

"For the country, nursie," she said. "He'll have weared them out before it's time for us to go to the country. It won't be summer for a long while, and last year we didn't go even when summer comed."

Nurse looked a little vexed. Miss Field, though smiling and good-natured, was not a special favourite of nurse's; she was too fond of talking, and she

stood there now looking very much amused at Peggy's remonstrance.

"If you didn't go to the country last year, Miss Margaret," said nurse, "more reason that you'll go this. But little girls can't know everything."

Peggy opened her eyes and her mouth. She was just going to ask nurse what was the matter, which would not have made things better, I am afraid, when Baby changed the subject by bursting out crying. Poor Baby—he did not like the little curtained-off room at all; it was rather dark, and he felt frightened, and as was of course the most sensible thing to do under the circumstances, as he could not speak, he cried.

"Dear, dear," said nurse, after vainly trying to soothe him, "he doesn't like being in here, the poor lamb. He's frightened. I'll never get him quiet here. Miss Peggy, love," forgetting in her hurry the presence of Miss Field, for before strangers Peggy was always "Miss Margaret," with nurse, "I'll have to put him back in his perambulator at the door, and if you'll stand beside him he'll be quite content."

And nurse got up as she spoke. Peggy slid herself down slowly and reluctantly from her seat; she

would have liked to stay and watch Hal being fitted with boots, and she would have liked still more to ask nurse what she meant by speaking of the country so long before the time, but it was Peggy's habit to do what she was told without delay, and she knew she could ask nurse what she wanted afterwards. So with one regretful look back at the snug corner where Hal was sitting comfortably staring at his stockinged toes, she trotted across the shop to the door where Baby, quite restored to good humour, was being settled in his carriage.

"There now, he'll be quite happy. Nurse will come soon, dear. Just let him stay here in the doorway; he can see all the boots and shoes in the window—that will amuse him."

"Yes," said Peggy, adding in her own mind that she would have a good look at the dear, tiny dolls' ones and fix which she would like to buy if she had the money.

Baby did not interrupt her; he was quite content now he was out in the light and the open air, and amused himself after his own fashion by crowing and chuckling to the passers-by. So Peggy stood still, her eyes fixed on the baby shoes. They were of all colours, black and red and bronze and blue—

"Baby did not interrupt her; he was quite content now he was out in the light and the open air, and amused himself after his own fashion by crowing and chuckling to the passers-by. So Peggy stood still, her eyes fixed on the baby shoes. They were of all colours, black and red and bronze and blue – it was difficult to say which was the prettiest." pp. 68-69

it was difficult to say which were the prettiest. Peggy had almost decided upon a red pair, and was wondering how much money it would take to buy them, when some one touched her on the shoulder. She looked up; a lady was standing behind her, smiling in amusement.

"What are you gazing at so, my dear? Is this your baby in the perambulator? You had better wheel him a little bit farther back, or may I do so for you?—he has worked himself too far into the doorway."

Peggy looked up questioningly in the lady's face. Like many children she did not like being spoken to by strangers in any unceremonious way; she felt as if it were rather a freedom.

But the face that met hers was too kind and bright and pleasant to resist, and though Peggy still looked grave, it was only that she felt rather shy.

"Yes," she said, "he's our baby. I was looking at those sweet little shoes. I didn't see Baby had pushed hisself away. Thank you," as the lady gently moved the perambulator a little farther to one side.

"You and Baby are not alone? Are you waiting for some one?" she asked.

"Nurse is having Hal tried on for new boots," Peggy replied, "and Baby didn't like the shop 'cos it were rather dark."

"And so his kind little sister is taking care of him. I see," said the lady. "And what are the sweet little shoes you like so much to look at? Are they some that would fit Baby?"

"Oh no," said Peggy, "they'd be too little for him. Baby *is* rather fat. Oh no, it's *those* under the glass basin turned upside down," and she pointed to the dolls' shoes. "Aren't they lovely? I've seen them ever since I was quite little—I suppose they'd cost a great lot," and Peggy sighed.

"Which do you think the prettiest?" asked the lady.

"The red ones," Peggy replied.

"Well, I almost think I agree with you," said the lady. "Good-bye, my dear, don't let Baby run himself out into the street." And with a kind smile she went on into the shop.

She passed back again in a few minutes.

"Still there?" she said, nodding to Peggy, and then she made her way down the street and was soon out of sight. Peggy's attention, since the lady had warned her, had been entirely given to Baby,

otherwise she might perhaps have noticed a very wonderful thing that had happened in the shop-window. The pair of red dolls' shoes was no longer there! They had been quietly withdrawn from the case in which they, with their companions, had spent a peaceful, but it must be allowed a rather dull life for some years.

In another minute nurse and Hal made their appearance, and Hal had a parcel, which he was clutching tightly in both hands.

"My new boots is *so* shiny," he said, "I do so hope they'll squeak. Does you think they will, nursie? But isn't poor Peggy to have new boots, too? *Poor* Peggy!"

Peggy looked down at her feet.

"Mine isn't wored out yet," she said; "it would take all poor mamma's money to buy new boots for us *all*."

"Never fear," said nurse, who heard rather a martyr tone in Peggy's voice, "you'll not be forgotten, Miss Peggy. But Master Hal, hadn't you better put your boots in the perambulator? You'll be tired of carrying them, for we're not going straight home."

Hal looked as if he were going to grumble at this,

but before he had time to say anything, Miss Field came hurrying out of the shop.

"Oh, you're still here," she said; "that's all right. The lady who's just left told father to give this little parcel to missie here," and she held out something to Peggy, who was so astonished that for a moment or two she only stared at the girl without offering to take the tiny packet.

"For me," she said at last.

"Yes, missie, to be sure—for you, as I say."

Peggy took the parcel, and began slowly to undo it. Something red peeped out—Peggy's eyes glistened—then her cheeks grew nearly as scarlet as the contents of the packet, and she seemed to gasp for breath, as she held out for Hal and nurse to see the little red shoes which five minutes before she had been admiring under the glass shade.

"Nursie, Hal," she exclaimed, "see, oh see! The sweet little shoes—for me—for my very own."

Nurse was only too ready to be pleased, but with the prudence of a "grown-up" person she hesitated a moment.

"Are you sure there's no mistake, miss?" she said, anxiously. "Do you know the lady's name? Is she a friend of Missis's, I wonder?"

The girl shook her head.

"Can't say, I'm sure," she replied. "She's a stranger to us. She only just bought a pair of cork soles and these here. There's no mistake, that, I'm sure of. She must have seen the young lady was admiring of them."

"Yes," said Peggy, "she asked me which was the prettiest, and I said the red ones."

"You see?" said Miss Field to nurse. "Well, missie, I hope as they'll fit Miss Dolly, and then you'll give us your custom when they're worn out, won't you?"

And with a good-natured laugh she turned back into the shop.

"It's all right, nursie, isn't it? Do say it is. I may keep them; they *is* mine, isn't they?" said Peggy, in very unusual excitement.

Nurse still looked undecided.

"I don't quite know what to say, my dear," she replied. "We must ask your mamma. I shouldn't think she'd object, seeing as it was so kindly meant. And we can't give back the shoes now they're bought and paid for. It wouldn't be fair to the lady to give them back to Field just to be sold again. It wasn't *him* she wanted to give a present to."

"No," said Peggy, trotting along beside the perambulator and clasping her little parcel as Hal was clasping his bigger one, "it was *me* she wanted to please. She's a *very* kind lady, isn't she, nursie? I'm sure they cost a great lot of money—p'raps a pound. Oh! I do so hope mamma will say I may keep them for my very own. Can't we go home now this minute to ask her?"

"We shouldn't find her in if we did," said nurse, "and we've had nothing of a walk so far. But don't you worry, Miss Peggy. I'm sure your mamma will not mind."

Peggy's anxious eager little face calmed down at this; a corner of the paper in which her treasures were wrapped up was torn. She saw the scarlet leather peeping out, and a gleam of delight danced out of her eyes; she bent her head down and kissed the speck of bright colour ecstatically, murmuring to herself as she did so, "Oh, how happy I am!"

Nurse overheard the words.

"Missis will never have the heart to take them from her, poor dear," she thought. "She'll be only too pleased for Miss Peggy to have something to cheer her up when she has to be told about our going."

And Peggy, in blissful ignorance of any threatening cloud to spoil her pleasure, marched on, scarcely feeling the ground beneath her feet ; as happy as if the tiny red shoes had been a pair of fairy ones to fit her own little feet.

Mamma was not at home when they got in, even though they made a pretty long round, coming back by Fernley Road, which, however, Peggy did not care about as much as when they set off by it. For coming back, of course she could not see the hills without turning round, nor could she have the feeling that every step was taking her nearer to them. The weather was clearing when they came in; from the nursery window the sky towards the west had a faint flush upon it, which looked as if the sunset were going to be a rosy one.

"Red at night," Peggy said to herself as she glanced out; "nursie, that means a fine day, doesn't it?"

"So they say," nurse replied.

"Then it'll be a fine day to-morrow, and I'll see the cottage, and I'll put the little shoes on the window-sill, so that they shall see it too—the *dear* little sweets," chattered the child to herself.

Hal meanwhile was seated on the floor, engaged

in a more practical way, namely, *trying* to try on his new boots. But "new boots," as he said himself, "is stiff." Hal pulled and tugged till he grew very red in the face, but all in vain.

"Oh, Peggy!" he said, "do help me. I does so want to hear them squeak, and to 'upprise the boys when they come in."

Down went kind Peggy on the floor, and thanks to her the boots were got on, though the buttoning of them was beyond her skill. Hal was quite happy, though.

"They do squeak, don't they, Peggy?" he said; "and nurse 'll let me wear them a little for them to get used to my feet 'afore we go to the country."

"You mean for your feet to get used to them, Hallie," said Peggy. "But there's lots of time for that. Why, they'll be half wored out before we go to the country if you begin them now."

"'Tisn't nonsense," said Hal, sturdily. "Nurse said so to that girl in the shop."

Peggy felt very puzzled.

"But, Hal," she was beginning, when a voice interrupted her. It was nurse. She had been downstairs, having heard the front door bell ring.

"Miss Peggy, your mamma wants you. She's come in. You'll find her in her own room."

"Nursie," she said, "Hal's been saying——"

"You mustn't keep your mamma waiting," said nurse. "I've told her about the little shoes."

"I'll take them to show her—won't she be pleased?" said Peggy, seizing the little parcel which she had put down while helping Hal.

And off she set.

She stopped at her mother's door; it was only half shut, so she did not need to knock.

"Mamma dear, it's me—Peggy," she said.

"Come in, darling," mamma's voice replied.

"I've brought you the *sweet* little red shoes to see," said Peggy, carefully unfolding the paper which held her treasures, and holding them out for mamma's admiration.

"They are very pretty indeed—really lovely little shoes," she said, handling them with care, but so as to see them thoroughly. "It was *very* kind of that lady. I wonder who she was? Of course in a general way I wouldn't like you to take presents from strangers, but she must have done it in such a very nice way. Was she an old lady, Peggy?"

"Oh yes!" said Peggy, "quite old. She was neely as big as you, mamma dear. I daresay she's *neely* as old as you are."

Mamma began to laugh.

"You little goose," she said. But Peggy didn't see anything to laugh at in what she had said, and her face remained quite sober.

"I don't understand you, mamma dear," she said.

"Well, listen then; didn't Hal buy a pair of new boots for himself to-day?" mamma began.

"No, mamma dear. Nurse buyed them *for* he," Peggy replied.

"Or rather *I* bought them, for it was my money nurse paid for them with, if you are so very precise, Miss Peggy. But never mind about that. All I want you to understand is the difference between 'big' and 'old.' Hal's boots are much bigger than these tiny things, but they are not on that account *older*."

Peggy began to laugh.

"No, mamma dear. P'raps Hallie's boots is younger than my sweet little red shoes, for they has been a great long while in the shop window, and Baldwin and Terry sawed them when they was little."

"Not 'younger,' Peggy dear; 'newer,' you mean. Boots aren't alive. You only speak of live things as 'young.'"

Peggy sighed.

"It is rather difficult to understand, mamma dear."

"It will all come by degrees," said mamma. "When I was a little girl I know I thought for a long time that the moon was the mamma of the stars, because she looked so much bigger."

"I think that's very nice, mamma, though, of course, I understand it's only a *fancy* fancy. I haven't seen the moon for a long time, mamma. May I ask nurse to wake me up the next time the moon comes?"

"You needn't wait till dark to see the moon," said mamma. "She can often be seen by daylight, though, of course, she doesn't look so pretty then. as in the dark sky which shows her off better. But, of course, the sky here is so often dull with the smoke of the town that we can't see her as clearly in the daytime as where the air is purer."

"Like in the country, mamma," said Peggy. "It's *always* clear in the country, isn't it?"

"Not quite always," said mamma, smiling. "But, Peggy dear, speaking of the country——"

"Oh yes!" Peggy interrupted, "I want to tell you, mamma, what a silly thing Hallie *would* say

about going to the country;" and she told her mother all that Hal had said about his boots, and indeed what nurse had said too; "and nursie was just a weeay, teeny bit cross to me, mamma dear," said Peggy, plaintively. "She wouldn't say she'd mistooked about it."

Mamma looked rather grave, and instead of saying at once that of course nurse had only meant that Hal's boots should last till the summer, she took Peggy on her knee and kissed her—kissed her in rather a "funny" way, thought Peggy, so that she looked up and said—

"Mamma dear, why do you kiss me like that?"

Instead of answering, mamma kissed her again, which almost made Peggy laugh.

But mamma was not laughing.

"My own little Peggy," she said, "I have something to tell you which I am afraid will make you unhappy. It is making *me* very unhappy, I know."

"Poor dear little mamma," said Peggy, and as she spoke she put up her little hand and stroked her mother's face. "Don't be unhappy if it isn't anything *very* bad. Tell Peggy about it, mamma dear."

CHAPTER VI

FELLOW-FEELINGS AND SLIPPERS

"If I'd as much money as I could tell
I never would cry 'old clothes to sell'!"
London Cries.

MAMMA hesitated a moment. Then she began.

"You know, Peggy, my pet," she said, "for a good while now I haven't been as strong and well as I used to be——"

"Stop, mamma, stop," said Peggy, with a sort of cry, and as she spoke she threw up her hands and pressed them hard against her ears; "I know what you're going to say, but I can't bear it, no, I can't. Oh mamma, you're not to say you're going to die."

For all answer mamma caught Peggy into her arms and kissed her again and again. For a minute or two it seemed as if she could not speak, but at last she got her voice. And then, rather to Peggy's

surprise, she saw that although there were tears in mamma's eyes, and even one or two trickling down her face, she was smiling too.

"My darling Peggy," she said, "did I frighten you? I am so, so sorry. Oh no, darling, it is nothing like that. Please God I shall live to see my Peggy as old as I am now, and older, I hope. No, no, dear, it is nothing so very sad I was going to tell you. It is only that the doctor says the best way for me to get quite well and strong again is to go away for a while to have change of air as it is called, in some nice country place."

"In the country," said Peggy, her eyes brightening with pleasure. "Oh, how nice! will it perhaps be that country where my cottage is? Oh, dear mamma, how lovely! And when are we to go? May we begin packing to-day? And how could you think it would make me unhappy——" she went on, suddenly remembering what her mother had said at first.

Mamma's face did not brighten up at all.

"Peggy dear, it is very hard for me to tell you," she said. "Of course, if we had all been going together it would have been only happy. But that's just the thing. I can't take you with me, my sweet. Baby must go, because nurse must, and Hallie too.

But the friend I am going to stay with can't have more of us than the two little ones, and nurse, and me—it is very, very good of her to take so many."

"Couldn't I sleep with you, mamma dear?" said Peggy in a queer little voice, the tone of which went to mamma's heart.

"My pet, Hallie must sleep with me, as it is. My friend's house isn't very big. And there's another reason why I can't take you—I'm not sure if you could understand——"

"Tell it me, please, mamma."

"The lady I am going to had a little girl just like you—I mean just the same age, and rather like you altogether, I think. And the poor little girl died two years ago, Peggy. Since then it is a pain to her mother to see other little girls. When you are bigger and not so like what her little girl was, I daresay she won't mind."

Peggy had been listening, her whole soul in her eyes.

"I understand," she said. "I wouldn't like to go if it would make that lady cry—if it hadn't been for that—oh mamma, I could have squeezed myself up so very tight in the bed! You and Hallie wouldn't have knowed I were there. But I wouldn't like to

make her cry. I am so sorry about that little girl. Mamma, how is it that dying is so nice, about going to heaven, you know, and *still* it is so sorry?"

"There is the parting," said mamma.

"Yes—that must be it. And, mamma, I hope it isn't naughty, but if you were to die I'd be *very* sorry not to see you again just the same—even if you were to be a very pretty angel, with shiny clothes and all that, I'd want you to be my own old mamma."

"I would be your own old mamma, dear. I am sure you would feel I was the same."

"I'm so glad," said Peggy. "Still it is sad to die," and she sighed. "Mamma dear, you won't be very long away, will you? It'll only be a little short parting, won't it?"

"Only a few weeks, dear. And I hope you won't be unhappy even though you must be a little lonely."

"If only I had a sister," said Peggy.

But mamma went on to tell her all she had planned. Miss Earnshaw, a dressmaker who used sometimes to come and sew, was to be with Peggy as much as she could. She was a gentle nice girl, and Peggy liked her.

"She has several things to make for me just now"

said mamma, "and as she lives near, she will try to come every day, so that she will be with you at dinner and tea. And Fanny will help you to dress and undress, and either she or Miss Earnshaw will take you a walk every day that it is fine enough. And then in the evenings, of course, the boys will be at home, and papa will see you every morning before he goes."

"And I daresay he'll come up to see me in bed at night too," said Peggy. Then she was silent for a minute or two; the truth was, I think, that she was trying hard to swallow down a lump in her throat that *would* come, and to blink away two or three tiresome tears that kept creeping up to her eyes.

Two days later and they were gone. Mamma, nurse, Hal, and Baby, with papa to see them off, and two boxes outside the cab, and of course a whole lot of smaller packages inside.

Peggy stood at the front-door, nodding and kissing her hand and making a smile, as broad a one as she possibly could, to show that she was not crying.

When they were gone, really gone, and Fanny had shut the door, she turned kindly to Peggy.

"Now, Miss Peggy, love, what will you do? Miss Earnshaw won't be here till to-morrow. I'll try to

be ready so as to take you out this afternoon if it's fine, for it's not a half-holiday. It'd be very dull for you all day alone—to-morrow the young gentlemen will be at home as it's Saturday."

A bright idea struck Peggy.

"Fanny," she said, "did mamma or nurse say anything about soap-bubbles?"

Fanny shook her head.

"No, miss. But I'm sure there'd be no objection to your playing at them if you liked. I can easy get a little basin and some soap and water for you. But have you a pipe?"

Peggy shook her head.

"It isn't for me, Fanny, thank you," she said. "It's for my brothers most. I'd like to make a surprise for them while mamma's away."

"Yes, that would be very nice," said Fanny, who had been charged at all costs to make Peggy happy. "We'll talk about it. But I'd better get on with my work, so as to get out a bit this afternoon."

"Very well. I'll go up to the nursery," said the little girl.

The nursery seemed very strange. Peggy had never seen it look quite so empty. Not only were

nurse and the little ones gone, but it seemed as if everything belonging to them had gone too, for nurse had sat up late the night before and got up very early this same morning to put everything into perfect order before leaving. The tidiness was quite unnatural. Peggy sat down in a corner and gave a deep sigh. Just then she did not even care to turn to the window, where the sunshine was pouring in brightly, sparkling on the two little scarlet shoes, standing side by side on the sill, where Peggy placed them every fine morning, that they might enjoy the sight of the white cottage on the hill!

"I almost wish it was raining," she half whispered to herself, till she remembered how very disagreeable a wet day would have been for mamma and the others to travel on. "I hope it will be a sunny day when they come back," she added, as a sort of make-up for her forgetfulness.

And then she got up and wandered into the other room. Here one of Hal's old shoes, which had fallen out of a bundle of things to be given away which nurse had taken downstairs just before going, was lying on the floor. Peggy stooped and picked it up. How well she knew the look of Hal's shoes; there was the round bump of his big toe, and the hole at

the corner where a bit of his red sock used to peep out! It gave her a strange dreamy feeling as she looked at it. It seemed as if it could not be true that Hallie was far away—"far, far away" by this time, thought Peggy, for she always felt as if the moment people were in the railway they were whizzed off hundreds of miles in an instant. She stroked the poor old shoe lovingly and kissed it. I don't think just then she would have parted with it for anything; it would have cost her less to give away the lovely little scarlet ones.

The thought of the old clothes turned her mind to the children at the back.

"I wonder if nurse gave them any of Hal's and Baby's old things," she said to herself.

And she went to the window with a vague idea of looking to see. She had not watched the Smileys or their relations much for some days; she had been busy helping mamma and nurse in various little ways, and her mind had been very full of the going away. She almost felt as if she had neglected her opposite neighbours, though, of course, they knew nothing about it, and she was quite pleased to see them all there as usual, or even more than usual. For it was so fine a day that Reddy and her mother

were evidently having a grand turn-out—a sort of spring cleaning, I suppose.

Small pieces of carpet, and one or two mats, much the worse for wear, were hanging out at the open windows. Reddy's head, tied up in a cloth to keep the dust out of her hair, was to be seen every minute or two, as she thumped about with a long broom, and Mary-Hann presently appeared with a pail of soapy water which she emptied at a grid in the gutter. Mary-Hann looked rather depressed, but Reddy's spirits were fully equal to the occasion. Had the window been open, Peggy felt sure she would have been able to hear her shouting to her sister to "look sharp," or to "mind what she was about," even more vigorously than usual.

The rest of the family, excepting, of course, the boys, were assembled on the pavement in front of Mr. Crick the cobbler's shop. He too had opened his window to enjoy the fine day, and in the background he could be dimly seen working, as dingy and leathery as ever. Mrs. Whelan's frilled cap and pipe looked out for a moment and then disappeared again. Apparently just then there was nobody or nothing she *could* scold.

For the poor children on the pavement were

behaving very quietly. The Smileys had stayed at home from school to mind the babies, with a view to smoothing the way for the spring cleaning, no doubt, and were sitting, each with a child on her lap, in two little old chairs they had carried down Crippley was rocking herself gently in her chair beside them, and the last baby but two, as Peggy then thought, was on his knees on the ground, amusing himself with two or three oyster shells and a few marbles. All these particulars Peggy, from her high-up nursery window, could not, of course, see clearly, but she saw enough to make her sigh deeply as she thought that after all, the Smileys were much to be envied.

"I daresay they're telling theirselves stories," she said to herself. "They look so comfable."

Just then the big baby happened to come more in sight, and she saw that one of the things he was playing with was a little shoe—an odd one apparently. He had filled it with marbles, and was pulling it across the stones. Up jumped Peggy from her seat on the window-sill.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, though there was no one to hear, "it must be the nother shoe of this. What a pity! They'd do for Tip, and p'raps they've

thought there wasn't a nother. How I would like to take it them! I'll call Fanny and see if she'll run across with it."

Downstairs she went, calling Fanny from time to time as she journeyed. But no Fanny replied; she was down in the kitchen, and to the kitchen Peggy knew mamma would not like her to go. She stood at last in the passage wondering what to do, when, glancing round, she noticed that the back-door opening into the yard was temptingly open. Peggy peeped out—there was no one there, but, still more tempting, the door leading into the small back street—the door just opposite the Smiley mansion—stood open, wide open too, and even from where she was the little girl could catch sight of the group on the other side of the narrow street.

She trotted across the yard, and stood for a minute, the shoe in her hand, gazing at the six children. The sound of their voices reached her.

"Halfred is quite took up with his shoe," said Brown Smiley. "I told mother she moight as well give it he—a hodd shoe's no good to nobody."

"'Tis a pity there wasn't the two of 'em," said Crippley, in a thin, rather squeaky voice. "They'd a done bee-vutiful for——"

"For Tip—yes, that's what *I* were thinking," cried an eager little voice. "Here's the other shoe; I've just founded it."

And little Peggy, with her neat hair and clean pinafore, stood in the middle of the children holding out Hal's slipper, and smiling at them, like an old friend.

For a moment or two they were all too astonished to speak; they could scarcely have stared more had they caught sight of a pair of wings on her shoulders, by means of which she had flown down from the sky.

Then Light Smiley nudged Crippley, and murmured something which Peggy could not clearly hear, about "th' young lady hopposite."

"Thank you, miss," then said Crippley, not quite knowing what to say. "Here, Halfred, you'll have to find summat else to make a carridge of; give us the shoe—there's a good boy."

Halfred stopped playing, and still on his knees on the pavement stared up suspiciously at his sister. Brown Smiley, by way of taking part in what was going on, swooped down over him and caught up the shoe before he saw what she was doing, cleverly managing to hold her baby on her knee all the same.

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And little Peggy, with her neat hair and clean pinafore, stood in the middle of the children holding out Hal's slipper, and smiling at them like an old friend.

"'Ere it be," she said. "Sarah, put Florence on Lizzie's lap for a minute, and run you upstairs with them two shoes to mother. They'll do splendid for Tommy, they will. And thank the young lady."

Sarah, otherwise Light Smiley, got up obediently, deposited *her* baby on Crippley's lap and held out her hand to Peggy for the other shoe, bobbing as she did so, with a "Thank you, miss."

Peggy left off smiling and looked rather puzzled.

"For Tommy," she repeated. "Who is Tommy? I thought they'd do for Tip. I——"

It was now the sisters' turn to stare, but they had not much time to do so, for Halfred, who had taken all this time to arrive at the knowledge that his new plaything had been taken from him, suddenly burst into a loud howl—so loud, so deliberate and determined, that Peggy stopped short, and all the group seemed for a moment struck dumb.

Brown Smiley was the first to speak.

"Come, now, Halfred," she said, "where's your manners? You'd never stop Tommy having a nice pair o' shoes."

But Halfred continued to weep—he gazed up at Peggy, the tears streaming down his smutty face, his mouth wide open, howling hopelessly.

"Poor little boy," said Peggy, looking ready to cry herself. "I wish I'd a nother old shoe for him.'

"Bless you, miss, he's always a-crying—there's no need to worry," said Crippley, whose real name was Lizzie. "Take him in with you, Sarah, and tell mother he's a naughty boy, that's what he is," and Light Smiley picked him up and ran off with him in such a hurry that Peggy stood still repeating "poor little boy" before she knew what had become of him.

Quiet was restored, however. Peggy, having done what she came for, should have gone home, but the attractions of society were too much for her. She lingered—Crippley pushed Sarah's empty chair towards her.

"Take a seat, miss," she said. "You'll excuse me not gettin' up. Onst I'm a-sittin' down, it's not so heasy."

Peggy looked at her with great interest.

"Does it hurt much?" she asked.

Lizzie smiled in a superior way.

"Bless you," she said again, "*hurt's* no word for it. It's hall over—but it's time I were used to it—never mind about me, missy. I'm sure it was most obligin' of you to bring the shoe, but won't your mamma and your nurse scold you?"

"My mamma's gone away, and so has my nurse," said Peggy. "I'm all alone."

All the eyes looked up with sympathy.

"Deary me, who'd a thought it?" said Brown Smiley. "But there must be somebody to do for you, miss."

"To what?" asked Peggy. "Of course there's cook, and Fanny, and my brothers, and my papa when he comes home."

Brown Smiley looked relieved. She was only a very little girl, not more than three years older than Peggy herself, though she seemed so much more, and she had really thought that the little visitor meant to say she was quite, quite by herself.

"Oh!" she said, "that's not being real alone."

"But it is," persisted Peggy. "It is very alone, I can tell you. I've nobody to play with, and nothing to do 'cept to look out of the window at you playing, and at the nother window at——"

"The winder to the front," said Lizzie, eagerly. "It must be splendid at your front, miss. Father told me onst you could see the 'ills—ever so far right away in Brackenshire. Some day if I could but get along a bit better I'd like fine to go round to your front, miss. I've never seed a 'ill."

Lizzie was quite out of breath with excitement. Peggy answered eagerly,

"Oh I do wish you could come to our day nursery window. When it's fine you can see the mountings —that's old, no, big hills, you know. And—on one of them you can see a white cottage; it does so shine in the sun."

"Bless me," said Lizzie, and both the Smileys, for Sarah had come back by now, stood listening with open mouths.

"Father's from Brackenshire," said Light Smiley, whose real name was Sarah. She spoke rather timidly, for she was well kept in her place by her four elder sisters. For a wonder they did not snub her.

"Yes, he be," added Matilda, "and he's told us it's bee-yutiful over there. He lived in a cottage, he did, when he were a little lad."

"Mebbe 'tis father's cottage miss sees shining," ventured Sarah. But this time she was not so lucky.

"Rubbish, Sarah," said Lizzie. "There's more'n one cottage in Brackenshire."

"And there's a mamma and a baby—and a papa who goes to work, in my cottage," said Peggy. "So

I don't think it could be——" but here she grew confused, remembering that all about the white cottage was only fancy, and that besides the Smileys' father *might* have lived there long ago. She got rather red, feeling somehow as if it was not very kind of her not to like the idea of its being his cottage. She had seen him once or twice; he looked big and rough, and his clothes were old—she could not fancy him ever having lived in her dainty white house.

Just then came a loud voice from the upper story, demanding Sarah.

"'Tis Mother Whelan," said Brown Smiley, starting up. "Rebecca said as how I was to run of an errant for her. It's time I were off."

Peggy turned to go.

"I must go home," she said. "P'raps I'll come again some day. If mamma was at home I'd ask her if you mightn't come to look out of the nursery window," she added, turning to Lizzie.

"Bless you," said the poor girl, "I'd never get up the stairs; thank you all the same."

And with a deep sigh of regret at having to leave such pleasant company, Peggy ran across the street home.

CHAPTER VII

A BUN TO THE GOOD

"The little gift from out our store."

THE yard door was still open; so was the house door. Peggy met no one as she ran in.

"Fanny's upstairs, p'raps," she said to herself. But no, she saw nothing of Fanny either on the way up or in the nursery. She did not feel dull or lonely now, however. She went to the back window and stood there for a minute looking at Crippley and Light Smiley, who were still there with the two babies. How funny it seemed that just a moment or two ago she had been down there actually talking to them! She could scarcely believe they were the very same children whom for so long she had known by sight.

"I am so glad I found the shoe," thought Peggy. "I wish, oh I do wish I could have a tea-party, and

'avite them all to tea. I daresay the father could carry Crippley upstairs—he's a very big man."

The thought of the father carried her thoughts to Brackenshire and the cottage on the hill, and she went into the day-nursery to look if the white spot was still to be seen. Yes, it was very bright and clear in the sunshine. Peggy gazed at it while a smile broke over her grave little face.

"How I do wish I could go there," she thought. "I wonder if the Smileys' father 'amembers about when he was a little boy, quite well. If he wasn't such a 'nugly man we might ask him to tell us stories about it."

Then she caught sight of the little scarlet shoes patiently standing on the window-sill.

"Dear little shoes," she said, "Peggy was neely forgetting you," and she took them up and kissed them. "Next time I go to see the Smileys," she thought, "I'll take the red shoes with me to show them. They *will* be pleased."

Then she got out her work and sat down to do it, placing her chair where she could see the hills from, the little shoes in her lap, feeling quite happy and contented. It seemed but a little while till Fanny came up to lay the cloth for Peggy's dinner. She

had been working extra hard that morning, so as to be ready for the afternoon, and perhaps her head was a little confused. And so when Peggy began telling her her adventures she did not listen attentively, and answered "yes" and "no" without really knowing what she was saying.

"And so when I couldn't find you, Fanny, I just runned over with the 'nother shoe myself. And the poor little boy what was playing with the—the *not* the 'nother one, you know, did so cry, but I think he soon left off. And some day I'm going to ask mamma to let me 'avite them all to tea, for them to see the hills, and——" but here Peggy stopped, "the hills, you know, out of the window."

"Yes, dear; very nice," said Fanny. "You've been a good little girl to amuse yourself so quietly all the morning and give no trouble. I do wonder if the washerwoman knows to come for the nursery things, or if I must send," she went on, speaking, though aloud, to herself.

So Peggy felt perfectly happy about all she had done, not indeed that she had had the slightest misgiving.

The afternoon passed very pleasantly. It was quite a treat to Peggy to go a walk in a grown-

up sort of way with Fanny, trotting by her side and talking comfortably, instead of having to take Hal's hand and lugging him along to keep well in front of the perambulator. They went up the Ferndale Road —a good way, farther than Peggy had ever been—so far indeed that she could scarcely understand how it was the hills did not seem much nearer than from the nursery window, but when she asked Fanny, Fanny said it was often so with hills—"nothing is more undependable." Peggy did not quite understand her, but put it away in her head to think about afterwards.

And when they came home it was nearly tea-time. Peggy felt quite comfortably tired when she had taken off her things and began to help Fanny to get tea ready for the boys, and when they arrived, all three very hungry and rather low-spirited at the thought of mamma and nurse being away, it was very nice for them to find the nursery quite as tidy as usual—indeed, perhaps, rather tidier—and Peggy, with a bright face, waiting with great pride to pour out tea for them.

"I think you're a very good housekeeper, Peg," said Terence, who was always the first to say something pleasant.

"Not so bad," agreed Thorold, patronisingly.

Baldwin sat still, looking before him solemnly, and considering his words, as was his way before *he* said anything.

"I think," he began at last, "I think that when I'm a big man I'll live in a cottage all alone with Peggy, and not no one else."

Peggy turned to him with sparkling eyes.

"A *white* cottage, Baldwin dear; do say a white cottage," she entreated.

"I don't mind—a white cottage, but quite a tiny one," he replied.

"Hum!" said Thor, "that's very good-natured, I must say. There'll be no room for visitors, do you hear, Terry?"

"Oh yes; p'raps there will sometimes," said Peggy.

"You'll let your poor old Terry come, won't you, Peg-top?" said Terence, coaxingly.

"Dear Terry," said Peggy.

"Haven't you been very dull all day alone, by the bye?" Terence went on.

"Not very," Peggy replied. "Fanny took me a nice walk, and this morning——" But she stopped short before telling more. She was afraid that

Thorold would laugh at her if she said how much she liked the children at the back, and then she had another reason. She wanted to "surprise" her brothers with a present of pipes for soap-bubbles, and very likely if she began talking about the back street at all it would make them think of Mrs. Whelan's, and then they might think of the pipes for themselves, which Peggy did not wish at all. She felt quite big and managing since she had paid a visit to the Smileys, and had a plan for going to buy the pipes "all by my own self."

"To-morrow," said Thorold, "there's to be a party at our school. We're all three to go."

Peggy's face fell.

"It's Saturday," she said. "I thought you'd have stayed with me."

Terence and Baldwin looked sorry.

"*I'll* stay at home," said Terry.

"No," said Thor, "I really don't think you can. They're counting on you for some of the games. Peg won't mind much for once, will you? I'm sorry too."

But before Peggy had time to reply, Baldwin broke in.

"I'll stay at home with Peg-top," he said, in his

slow, distinct way. "It won't matter for me not going. I'm one of the little ones."

"And we'll go a nice walk, won't we, Baldwin?" said Peggy, quite happy again. "And I daresay we may have something nice for tea. I'll ask papa," she added to herself. "I'm sure he'll give me some pennies when he hears how good Baldwin is."

Miss Earnshaw came the next morning, and in the interest of being measured for her new spring frock, and watching it being cut out, and considering what she herself could make with the scraps which the young dressmaker gave her, the time passed very pleasantly for Peggy.

Miss Earnshaw admired the red shoes very much, and was interested to hear the story of the unknown lady who had given them to Peggy, and told a story of a similar adventure of her own when she was a little girl. And after dinner she, for Fanny was very busy, took Peggy and Baldwin out for a walk, and on their way home they went to the confectioner's and bought six halfpenny buns with the three pennies papa had given Peggy that morning. At least the children thought there were only six but greatly to their surprise, when they undid the parcel on the nursery table, out rolled seven!

"Oh dear!" said Peggy, "she's gave us one too many. Must we go back to the shop with it, do you think, Miss Earnshaw? It's such a long way."

"I'll go," said Baldwin, beginning to fasten his boots again.

But Miss Earnshaw assured them it was all right.

"You always get thirteen of any penny buns or cakes for a shilling," she said; "and some shops will give you seven halfpenny ones for threepence. That's how it is. Did you never hear speak of a baker's dozen?"

Still Peggy did not feel satisfied.

"It isn't comfable," she said, giving herself a little wriggle — a trick of hers when she was put out. "Six would have been much nicer — just two for each," for Miss Earnshaw was to have tea with her and Baldwin.

The young dressmaker smiled.

"You *are* funny, Miss Peggy," she said. "Well, run off now and get ready for tea. We'll have Fanny bringing it up in a minute."

Peggy, the seventh bun still much on her mind, went slowly into the night nursery. Before beginning to take off her hat she strolled to the window and looked out. She had seen none of the children

to-day. Now, Brown Smiley was standing just in front of the house, a basket on her arm, staring up and down the street. She had been "of an errant" for Mrs. Whelan, but Mrs. Whelan's door was locked; she was either asleep or counting her money, and the little girl knew that if she went on knocking the old woman would get into a rage, so she was "waitin' a bit." She liked better to do her waiting in the street, for she had been busy indoors all the morning, and it was a change to stand there looking about her.

Peggy gazed at her for a moment or two. Then an idea struck her. She ran back into the nursery and seized a bun—the odd bun.

"They're all mine, you know," she called out to Baldwin; "but we'll have two each still."

Baldwin looked up in surprise. "What are you going to do with it?" he began to say, but Peggy was out of sight.

She was soon downstairs, and easily opened the back door. But the yard door was fastened; she found some difficulty in turning the big key. She managed it at last, however, and saw to her delight that Brown Smiley was still there.

"Brown," began Peggy, but suddenly recollecting that the Smileys had real names, she stopped short,

and ran across the street. "I can't 'amember your name," she exclaimed, breathlessly, "but I've brought you this," and she held out the bun.

Brown Smiley's face smiled all over.

"Lor', miss," she exclaimed. "You are kind, to be sure. Mayn't I give it to Lizzie? She's been very bad to-day, and she's eat next to nought. This 'ere 'll be tasty-like."

"Lizzie," repeated Peggy, "which is Lizzie? Oh yes, I know, it's Crippley."

Brown Smiley looked rather hurt.

"It's not her fault, miss," she said. "I'd not like her to hear herself called like that."

Peggy's face showed extreme surprise.

"How do you mean?" she said. "I've made names for you all. I didn't know your real ones."

Brown Smiley looked at her and saw in a moment that there was nothing to be vexed about.

"To be sure, miss. Beg your pardon. Well, she that's lame's Lizzie, and me, I'm Matilda-Jane."

"Oh yes," interrupted Peggy. "Well, you may give her the bun if you like. It's very kind of you, for I meant it for you. I'd like——" she went on, "I'd like to give you more, but you see papa gaved me the pennies for us, and p'raps he'd be vexed."

"To be sure, to be sure, that 'd never do," replied Matilda, quickly. "But oh, miss, we've been asking father about Brackenshire, and the cottages. 'Tis Brackenshire 'ills, sure enough, that's seen from your front."

"I knew that," said Peggy, in a superior way.

But Brown Smiley was too eager to feel herself snubbed.

"And oh, but he says it is bee-yutiful there—over on the 'ills. The air's that fresh, and there's flowers and big-leaved things as they calls ferns and brackens."

"And white cottages?" asked Peggy, anxiously.

"There's cottages—I didn't think for to ask if they was all white. My! If we could but go there some fine day. Father says it's not so far; many's the time he's walked over there and back again the next morning when he first comed to work here, you see, miss, and his 'ome was still over there like."

"Yes, in the white cottage," said Peggy. She had made up her mind that it was unkind not to "let it be" that the Smileys' father had lived in that very cottage, for he did seem to be a nice man in spite of his bigness and his dingy workman's clothes. If he wasn't nice and kind she didn't think the children would talk of him as they did.

"I can't 'amember your name," she exclaimed, breathlessly, "but I've brought you this," and she held out the bun.

Brown Smiley's face smiled all over.

"Lor', miss," she exclaimed. "You are kind, to be sure. Mayn't I give it to Lizzie? She's been very bad to-day, and she's eat next to nought. This 'ere'll be tasty-like."

* * * *

But suddenly a window above opened, and Mother Whelan's befrilled face was thrust out.

"What are ye about there then, and me fire burning itself away, and me tea ready, waiting for the bread? What's the young lady chatterin' to the likes o' you for? Go home, missy, darlin', go home."

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But she spoke absently; Matilda-Jane's words had put thoughts in her head which seemed to make her almost giddy. Brown Smiley stared at her for a minute.

"How she do cling to them cottages being white," she thought to herself, "but there—if it pleases her! She's but a little one." "White if you please, miss," she replied, "though I can't say as I had it from father."

But suddenly a window above opened, and Mother Whelan's befrilled face was thrust out.

"What are ye about there then, and me fire burning itself away, and me tea ready, waiting for the bread? What's the young lady chatterin' to the likes o' you for? Go home, missy, darlin', go home."

The two children jumped as if they had been shot.

"Will she beat you?" whispered Peggy, looking very frightened. But Brown Smiley shook her little round head and laughed.

"She won't have a chance, and she dursn't not to say beat us—father'd be down on her—but she doesn't think nought of a good shakin'. But I'll push the basket in and run off if she's in a real wax."

"Good-bye, then. You must tell me lots more about the hills. Ask your father all you can," and so saying, Peggy flew home again.

"Where 've you been, what did you do with the bun?" asked Baldwin, as soon as she came in to the nursery.

"I runned down with it, and gaved it to a little girl I saw in the street," said Peggy.

"Very kind and nice, I'm sure," said Miss Earnshaw. "Was it a beggar, Miss Peggy? You're sure your mamma and nurse wouldn't mind?" she added, rather anxiously.

"Oh no," said Peggy. "It's not a *beggar*. It's a proper little poor girl what nurse gives our nold clothes to."

"Oh," said Baldwin, "one of the children over the cobbler's, I suppose. But, Peggy," he was going on to say he didn't think his sister had ever been allowed to run down to the back street to speak to them, only he was so slow and so long of making up his mind that, as Fanny just then came in with the tea, which made a little bustle, nobody attended to him, and Miss Earnshaw remained quite satisfied that all was right.

The buns tasted very good—all the better to Peggy

from the feeling that poor lame Lizzie was perhaps eating hers at that same moment, and finding it "tasty."

"Does lame people ever get quite better?" she asked the young dressmaker.

"That depends," Miss Earnshaw replied. "If it's through a fall or something that way, outside of them so to say, there's many as gets better. But if it's *in* them, in the constitution, there's many as stays lame all their lives through."

Peggy wriggled a little. She didn't like to think about it much. It sounded so mysterious.

"What part's that?" she asked; "that big word."

"Constitootion," said Baldwin, as if he was trying to spell "Constantinople."

Miss Earnshaw laughed. She lived alone with her mother, and was not much used to children. But she was so pleasant-tempered and gentle that she easily got into their ways.

"I shouldn't use such long words," she said. "Our constitution just means ourselves—the way we're made. A strong, healthy person is said to have a good constitution, and a weakly person has a poor one."

Baldwin and Peggy both sat silent for a minute, thinking over what she said.

"I don't see how that's to do with crippling," said Peggy at last. "Does you mean," she went on, "that p'raps lame people's legs is made wrong—by mistake, you know. *In course* God wouldn't do it of purpose, would he?"

Baldwin looked rather startled.

"Peggy," he said, "I don't think you should speak that way."

Peggy turned her gray eyes full upon him.

"I don't mean to say anything naughty," she said. "*Is* it naughty, Miss Earnshaw?"

The young dressmaker had herself been rather taken aback by Peggy's queer speech, and for a moment or two scarcely knew what to say. But then her face cleared again.

"God can't make mistakes, Miss Peggy," she said, "and He is always kind. All the same there's many things that seem like one or the other, I know. It must be that there's reasons for them that we can't see—like when a doctor hurts anybody, it seems unkind, but it's *really* to do them good."

"Like when our doctor cutted poor Baby's tooths to make them come through," said Peggy, eagerly. "They was all *bleeding*, bleeding ever so, Miss Earnshaw. Baby didn't understand, and he was *very*

angry. He always sc'eams at the doctor now. I almost think he'd like to kill him."

Baldwin opened his mouth wide at these blood-thirsty sentiments of Baby's. He was too shocked to speak.

'But it is only 'cos he doesn't understand," Peggy went on, placidly. "*I* don't sc'eam at the doctor. I speak to him quite goodly, 'cos, you see, *I* understand."

Baldwin closed his mouth again. He looked at Peggy with admiring respect.

"Yes," agreed Miss Earnshaw, greatly relieved at the turn their talk had taken, "that's just it, Miss Peggy. You couldn't have put it better."

"Peggy," said Baldwin, "when you're big you should be a clergymunt."

CHAPTER VIII

UNDER THE BIG UMBRELLA

"As I was going up Pippin Hill,
Pippin Hill was dirty,
There I met a pretty miss,
And she dropped me a curtsey."

Old Nursery Rhyme.

NOTHING particular happened during the next few days. Peggy's little life went on regularly and peacefully. Miss Earnshaw came every morning, and either she or Fanny took Peggy a walk every afternoon, except twice when it rained, to the little girl's great disappointment.

The second of these wet days happened to be Friday. Peggy stood at the front nursery window that morning looking out rather sadly. There were no hills—no white spot to be seen, of course.

"I wonder what the Smileys do when it rains all

day," she said to herself. "I think I'll go to the back window and look if I can see any of them."

She had scarcely caught sight of her neighbours for some days. Only now and then she had seen the little ones tumbling about on the pavement, and once or twice the elder girls had brought their chairs down and sat there sewing. Lizzie had never come out. Peggy feared she must be still ill, and perhaps that made the others extra busy. It was not likely any of them would come out to-day, as it was raining so; but *sometimes* she was able to see their faces at the window. And on a rainy day some of the little ones at least would perhaps be looking out.

She turned to go to the other nursery when Miss Earnshaw spoke to her.

"I wouldn't be so vexed at its being wet to-day, Miss Peggy, if I was you," she said. "It'll be much worse if it's wet to-morrow, for it's your brothers' half-holiday."

"Is to-morrow Saturday?" asked Peggy.

"To be sure it is. And I'm afraid I can't possibly stay here in the afternoon. I've got to go to see a lady some way off about some work. I wish she hadn't fixed for Saturday. If it's fine it won't matter so much. Fanny and I were saying you could all

go a nice walk—the young gentlemen and you, with her. But if it's wet I don't know however she'll manage you all in the house."

Suddenly Peggy's eyes began to sparkle.

"Miss Earnshaw," she said, "I've thought of something. If you'll ask Fanny, I'm sure she'll say we can; we've not had them for such a long time, and I've got my four pennies and a halfpenny—that'll get six, you know, in case any's brokened."

Miss Earnshaw looked at her and then began to laugh.

"Miss Peggy dear, you must tell me first what you mean," she said. "Your thoughts come so fast that they run ahead of your words. What is it you mean to get six of—not buns?"

"Buns!" repeated Peggy. "You can't blow bubbles with buns. No, of course I meant pipes. Nice white pipes to blow soap-bubbles."

"Oh, to be sure," said Miss Earnshaw. "That's a very good idea, Miss Peggy, in case to-morrow afternoon's wet, and I shouldn't wonder if it was."

"And you'll ask Fanny?"

"Of course; you can ask her yourself for that matter. I'm sure she's the last to grudge you anything that'd please you and the young gentlemen.

And even if soap-bubbles are rather messy sometimes, it's easy to wipe up. It's not like anything dirty."

"Soap must be clean, mustn't it?" said Peggy, laughing. "But don't tell the boys, pelease, dear Miss Earnshaw. I do so want to 'apprise them. I can get the pipes to-morrow morning. I know where to get them," and quite happy, Peggy trotted off to take out her money-box and look to be quite sure that the three pennies and three halfpennies were there in safety, where for some weeks they had been waiting.

"Bless her heart," said the young dressmaker. "She is the sweetest little innocent darling that ever lived."

After looking over her pennies Peggy turned to the window. No, none of the Smileys were to be seen.

"Never mind," said Peggy to herself. "I'll p'raps see them to-morrow when I go for the pipes. I almost hope it 'll be a wet day. It will be so nice to blow soap-bubbles. Only," and she sighed a little, "it does seem such a very long time since I sawed the white cottage."

To-morrow *was* rainy, very rainy, with no look of

"going to clear up" about it. The boys grumbled a good deal at breakfast at the doleful prospect of a dull half-holiday in the house.

"And papa's going away to-day till Monday," said Thorold; "so there'll be no going down to the dining-room to sit beside him while he's at dinner for a change."

"Poor papa," said Peggy, "he'll get very wet going such a long way."

"Nonsense, you little goose," said Thor, crossly. "People don't get wet in cabs and railway carriages."

"I forgot," said Peggy, meekly.

"You shouldn't call her a goose, Thor," said Terence. "It's very disagreeable to travel on a very rainy day. I've often heard people say so."

"I wish I was going to travel, rainy or not, I know that," grumbled Thorold. "Here we shall be mewed up in this stupid nursery all the afternoon with nothing to do."

"There's lots of things to do," said Baldwin. "I think I'll write a letter to mamma for one thing. And I want to tidy my treasure-box and——"

"You're a stupid," said Thorold. "You're too fat and slow to have any spirit in you."

"Now, Thorold, I say that's not fair," said Terry.

"Would it show spirit to grumble? You'd be down upon him if he did. There's no pleasing you."

"*I* know something that would please him," said Peggy, who was trembling between eagerness to tell and determination *not* to tell her "surprise."

"What?" said Thor, rather grumpily still.

"I'm not going to tell you till you come home. And it'll only be if it's a rainy afternoon," said Peggy.

Terence and Baldwin pricked up their ears.

"Oh, do tell us, Peg-top," they said.

But the little girl shook her head.

"No, no," she replied. "I've promised myself—*quite* promised not."

"There's a reason for you," said Thor. But his tone was more good-natured now. He felt ashamed of being so cross when the little ones were so kind and bright.

"I'll really, *truly* tell you when you come back from school," said Peggy, and with this assurance the boys had to content themselves.

Miss Earnshaw arrived as usual, or rather not as usual, for she was dripping, poor thing, and had to leave her waterproof downstairs in the kitchen.

"What weather, Miss Peggy," she said, as she came in. "I thought it would be a wet day, but not

such a pour. It is unfortunate that I have to go so far to-day, isn't it? And I'm sorry to leave you children alone too."

"Never mind," said Peggy, cheerily; "we'll be quite happy with the soap bubbles. I've got my money quite ready. Mayn't I go and get the pipes now?"

"Out, my dear? In such weather!" exclaimed Miss Earnshaw.

"Oh, but it's *quite* near," said Peggy. "Just hop out of the door and you're there. The boys always buy their pipes there, and mamma goes there herself sometimes to see the old woman."

"Well, wait a bit, any way. It can't go on raining as fast as this all the morning surely. It's real cats and dogs."

Peggy looked up in surprise.

"Cats and dogs, Miss Earnshaw?" she repeated.

"Oh, bless you, my dear, it's only a way of speaking," said the dressmaker, a little impatiently, for she was not very much accustomed to children. "It just means raining *very* hard."

Peggy went to the window to look out for herself. Yes indeed it was raining very hard. The little girl could not help sighing a little as she gazed at

the thick even gray of the clouds, hiding like a curtain every trace of the distant hills she was so fond of.

"I won't put out the little red shoes to-day," she said to herself, "there's nothing for them to see."

Then other thoughts crept into her mind.

"I wonder if it's raining at the white cottage too," she said to herself. And aloud she asked a question.

"Miss Earnshaw, pelease, does it ever rain in the country?" she said.

"Rain in the country! I should rather think it did. Worse than in town, you might say—that's to say, where there's less shelter, you'll get wetter and dirtier in the country, only of course it's not the same kind of really black sooty rain. But as for mud in country lanes! I shall see something of it this afternoon, I expect."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Peggy. "I thought it never rained in the country. I thought it was always quite pretty and lovely," and she sighed deeply. "I wonder what people who live in little cottages in the country do all day when it rains," she said.

"Why, my dear, much the same as other folk, I

should say. They have their rooms to clean, and their dinner to cook, and their children to look after. Still I daresay it'd be a bit drearier in the country of a right-down wet day like this, even than in town. I've never lived there myself, except for a week at a time at most, but mother was all her young days in the country."

"Everybody's fathers and mothers lived there," said Peggy, rather petulantly. "Why don't peoples let their children live there now?"

Miss Earnshaw laughed a little. Peggy did not like her to laugh in that way, and she gave herself a little wriggle, though poor Miss Earnshaw certainly did not mean to vex her.

"There are plenty of children in the country too, Miss Peggy," she said. "Mother's youngest sister has twelve."

"Twelve," repeated Peggy, "*how* nice! at least if there's lots of sisters among them, and no very little babies. Do they live over in that country?" she went on, pointing in the direction of the invisible hills, "that country called Brack—— You know the name."

"Brackenshire," said Miss Earnshaw, "no, my mother comes from much farther off. A very pretty

place it must be by what she says. Not but what Brackenshire's a pretty country too. I've been there several times with the Sunday school for a treat."

"And did you see the hills and the white cottages?" asked Peggy breathlessly.

"Oh yes, the hills are beautiful, and there's lots of cottages of all kinds. They look pretty among the trees, even though they're only poor little places, most of them."

"The white ones is the prettiest," said Peggy, as if she knew all about it.

"Yes, I daresay," said Miss Earnshaw, without paying much attention; she had got to rather a difficult part of the sleeve she was making.

"Did you ever walk all the way there when you was a little girl?" Peggy went on.

"Oh yes, of course," Miss Earnshaw replied, without the least idea of what she was answering.

"Really!" said Peggy, "how nice!" Then seeing that the dressmaker was absorbed in her work: "Miss Earnshaw," she said, "I'm going for the pipes now. It isn't raining *quite* so fast, and I'll not be long."

"Very well, my dear," Miss Earnshaw replied, and Peggy went off to fetch her pennies from the drawer in the other nursery where she kept them.

She had a new idea in her head, an idea which Miss Earnshaw's careless words had helped to put there, little as she knew it.

"If I see the Smileys," thought Peggy, "I'll tell them what she said."

She glanced out of the window, dear me, how lucky! There stood Brown Smiley looking out at the door, as if she were hesitating before making a plunge into the dripping wet street. It did seem at the back as if it were raining faster than in front. Peggy opened the cupboard and took out her little cloak which was hanging there.

"I won't put on my hat," she thought, "'cos nurse says the rain spoils the feavers. I'll get a numbrella downstairs, and then I *can't* get wet, and here's my pennies all right in my pocket. I do hope Brown Smiley will wait till I get down."

She made all the haste she could, and found, as she expected, an umbrella in the stand downstairs. It was not very easy to open, but she succeeded at last, then came, however, another difficulty, she could not get herself and the umbrella through the back door together.

"Dear me," thought Peggy, "I wonder how people does with their numbrellas. They *must* open them in

the house, else they'd get wet standing outside while they're doing it. I never looked to see how nurse does, but then we almost never go out when it's rainy. I 'appose it's one of the hard things big peoples has to learn. Oh, dear! *won't* it come through?"

No, she couldn't manage it, at least not with herself under it. At last a brilliant idea struck Peggy ; anything was better than closing the tiresome thing now she *had* got it opened—she would send it first and follow after herself. So the umbrella was passed through, and went slipping down the two or three steps that led into the yard, where it lay gaping up reproachfully at Peggy, who felt inclined to call out "Never mind, poor thing, I'm coming d'reckly."

And as "d'reckly" as possible she did come, carefully closing the door behind her, for fear the rain should get into the house, which, together with the picking up of the umbrella, far too big and heavy a one for a tiny girl, took so long that I am afraid a good many drops had time to fall on the fair uncovered head before it got under shelter again.

But little cared Peggy. She felt as proud as a peacock, the umbrella representing the tail, you understand, when she found herself outside the yard door,

which behaved very amiably, fairly under weigh for her voyage across the street. She could see nothing before her; fortunately, however, no carriages or carts ever came down the narrow back way.

Half-way over Peggy stopped short—she had forgotten to look if Brown Smiley was still standing there. It was not easy to get a peep from under the umbrella, without tilting it and herself backwards on to the muddy road, but with great care Peggy managed it. Ah dear, what a disappointment! There was no little girl in front of the cobbler's window, but glancing to one side, Peggy caught sight of the small figure with a shawl of "mother's" quaintly drawn over the head, trotting away down the street. With a cry Peggy dashed after her.

"Oh, Brown Smiley," she called out, "do come back. I'm too frightened to go to buy the pipes alone," for what with her struggles and her excitement, the little damsel's nerves were rather upset. "Oh, Brown Smiley—no—no, that's not her name, oh what *is* your name, Brown Smiley?" and on along the rough pavement behind the little messenger she rushed, if indeed poor Peggy's toddling, flopping from one side to another progress, could possibly be called "rushing."

"But an umbrella rolling itself about on the pavement, an umbrella from which proceeds most piteous wails, an umbrella from underneath which, when you get close to it, you see two little feet sticking out, and by degrees two neat black legs, and then a muddle of short skirts, which by rights should be draping the legs, but have somehow got all turned upside down like a bird's feathers ruffled up the wrong way—*such* an umbrella, or perhaps I should say an umbrella in such circumstances, may certainly be called a strange sight, may it not?"

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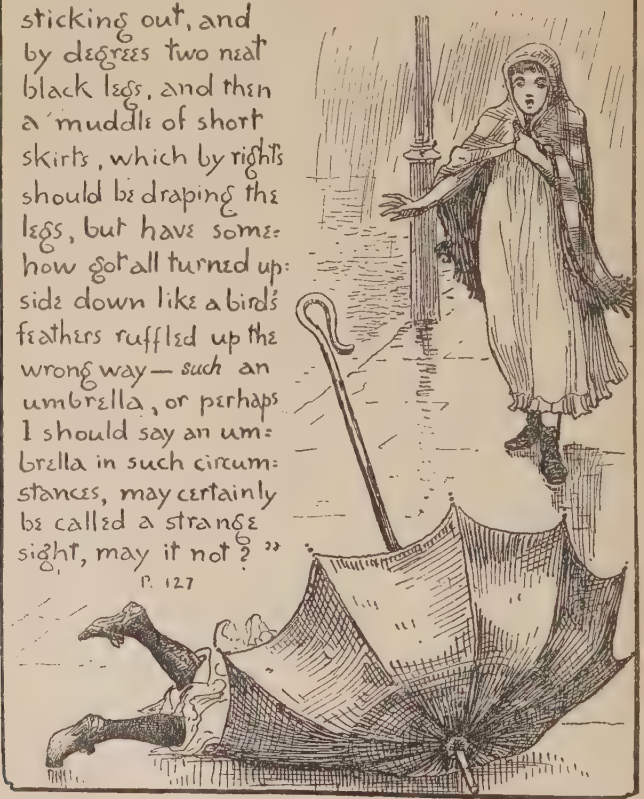

It came to an end quickly—the paving-stones were rough and uneven, the small feet had only "my noldest house-shoes" to protect them, and the "numbrella" was sadly in the way; there came suddenly a sharp cry, so piercing and distressful that even Matilda-Jane, accustomed as she was to childish sounds of woe of every kind and pitch, was startled enough to turn round and look behind her.

"Can it be Halfred come a-runnin' after me?" she said to herself. But the sight that met her eyes puzzled her so, that at the risk of Mother Whelan's scoldings for being so long, she could not resist running back to examine for herself the strange object. This was nothing more nor less than an umbrella, and an umbrella in itself is not an uncommon sight. But an umbrella rolling itself about on the pavement, an umbrella from which proceeds most piteous wails, an umbrella from underneath which, when you get close to it, you see two little feet sticking out and by degrees two neat black legs, and then a muddle of short skirts, which by rights should be draping the legs, but have somehow got all turned upside down like a bird's feathers ruffled up the wrong way—*such* an umbrella, or perhaps I should say an umbrella in such circumstances,

certainly may be called a strange sight, may it not?

Matilda-Jane Simpkins, for that was Brown Smiley's whole long name, thought so any way, for she stood stock still, staring, and the only thing she could collect herself enough to say was, "Lor'!"

But her state of stupefaction only lasted half a moment. She was a practical and business-like little person; before there was time for another cry for help, she had disentangled the umbrella and its owner, and set the latter on her feet again, sobbing piteously, and dreadfully dirty and muddy, but otherwise not much the worse.

Then Matilda-Jane gave vent to another exclamation.

"Bless me, missy, it's *you!*" she cried. "Whatever are you a-doing of to be out in the rain all alone, with no 'at and a humbrella four sizes too big for the likes of you, and them paper-soled things on yer feet? and, oh my! ain't yer frock muddy? What'll your folk say to you? Or is they all away and left you and the cat to keep 'ouse?"

"I was running after you, Brown Smiley," sobbed Peggy. She could not quite make out if Matilda-Jane was making fun of her or not, and,

indeed, to do Matilda justice, she had no such intention. "I was running after *you*," Peggy repeated, "and you *wouldn't* stop, and I couldn't run fast 'cos of the numbrella, and so I felled down."

"Never mind, missy dear, you'll be none the worse, you'll see. Only, will they give it you when you go home for dirtying of your frock?"

"Give it me?" repeated Peggy.

"Yes, give it you; will you get it—will you catch it?" said Matilda, impatiently.

"I don't know what you mean," Peggy replied.

Matilda wasted no more words on her. She took her by the arm, umbrella and all, and trotted her down the street again till they had reached the Smiley mansion. Then she drew Peggy inside the doorway of the passage, whence a stair led up to Mrs. Whelan's, and to the Simpkins's own rooms above that again, and having shut up the umbrella with such perfect ease that Peggy gazed at her in admiration, she tried to explain her meaning.

"Look 'ere now, miss;" she said, "which 'll you do—go straight over-the-way 'ome, just as you are, or come in along of *huz* and get yerself cleaned up a bit?"

"Oh, I'll go in with you, pelease," sobbed Peggy.

"P'raps Miss Earnshaw wouldn't scold me. She let me come, and I didn't fell down on purpose. But I *know* she wouldn't let me come out again—I'm sure she wouldn't, and I do so want to get the pipes my own self. You'll take me to Mrs. Whelan's, won't you, dear Brown Smiley?"

"I'll catch it when she sees I haven't done her errant," said Matilda. "But never mind; she'll not be so bad with you there, maybe. Come up with me, missy, and I'll get Rebecca to wipe you a bit," and she began the ascent of the narrow staircase followed by Peggy.

CHAPTER IX

THE OPPOSITE HOUSE

"There was an old woman that lived in a shoe,
She had so many children she didn't know what to do."
Nursery Rhymes.

In spite of her misfortunes, Peggy could not help feeling very pleased at finding herself at last inside the house she had watched so often from the outside. It was certainly not a pretty house—a big person would probably have thought it a very poor and uninteresting one; but it was not dirty. The old wooden steps were scrubbed down once a week regularly, so there was nothing to strike the little girl as disagreeable, and it seemed delightfully queer and mysterious as she climbed the steep, uneven staircase, which grew darker and darker as they went on, so that but for Brown Smiley's voice in front, Peggy would not have had the least idea where she was going.

"There's Mother Whelan's door," Matilda said in a half whisper, as if afraid of the old woman's pouncing out upon them, and Peggy wondered how she knew it, for to her everything was perfectly dark; "but we'll go upstairs first to Rebecca," and on they climbed.

Suddenly, what seemed for a moment a blaze of brilliant light from the contrast with the darkness where they were, broke upon them. Peggy quite started. But it was only the opening of a door.

"Is that you, Matilda-Jane? My, but you have been sharp. I should think old Whelan 'ud be pleased for onst."

The speaker was Reddy; she stood in the doorway, her bare red arms shining, as they always did, from being so often up to the elbows in soap and water.

"Oh, Rebecca, don't say nothin', but I've not been of my errant yet. Now, don't ye begin at me —'tweren't of my fault. I was a-'urryin' along when I saw miss 'ere a-rollin' in the wet with her humberellar, and I 'ad to pick her up. She's that muddy we were afeard they'd give it her over the way—her mar's away. So I told her as you'd tidy her up a bit. Come along, missy. Rebecca's got a

good 'eart, has Rebecca; she'll clean you nicely, you'll see."

For at the sound of Rebecca's sharp voice poor Peggy had slunk back into the friendly gloom of the staircase. But she came creeping forward now, so that Reddy saw her.

"Lor'!" said the big girl, "little miss from the hopposite winder to be sure."

This quite restored Peggy's courage.

"Have you seen me at the window?" she said. "How funny! I've looked at you lotses and lotses of times, but I never thought of you looking at me."

To which both sisters replied with their favourite exclamation, "Lor'!"

Just then came a voice from inside.

"Shut the door there, Rebecca, can't you? If there's one thing I can't abide, and you might know it, it's a hopen door, and the draught right on baby's head."

Rebecca took Peggy by the hand and drew her into the room, and while she was relating the story of little missy's misfortunes to her mother, little missy looked round her with the greatest interest.

It was a small room, but oh, how full of children! Dinner was being got ready "against father and the boys coming home," Matilda said, but where father

and the boys could possibly find space to stand, much less to sit, Peggy lay awake wondering for a long time that night. She counted over all those already present, and found they were all there except Lizzie, the lame girl. And besides the two babies and Alfred, whom she knew by sight, she was amazed to see a fourth, a very tiny doll of a thing—the tiniest thing she had ever seen, but which they all were as proud of as if there had never been a baby among them before. At this moment it was reposing in the arms of Mary-Hann; Light Smiley, whose real name was Sarah, you remember, was taking charge of the two big babies in one corner, while Reddy and her mother were busy at the fire, and "Halfred" was amusing himself quietly with some marbles, apparently his natural occupation.

What a lot of them! Peggy began to feel less sure that she would like to have as many sisters as the Smileys. Still they all looked happy, and their mother, whom Peggy had never seen before, had really a very kind face.

"I'll see to the pot, Rebecca," she said; "just you wipe missy's frock a bit. 'Twill be none the worse, you'll see. And so your dear mar's away missy. I 'ope the change 'll do her good."

"Yes, thank you," said Peggy. "She's gone to the country. Did you ever live in the country? And was it in a white cottage?"

Mrs. Simpkins smiled.

"No, missy, I'm town-bred. 'Tis father as knows all about the country; he's a Brackenshire man."

"Oh yes," said Peggy, "I forgot. It's Miss Earnshaw's mother I was thinking of."

"But father," said Matilda, "*he* can tell lots of tales about the country."

"I wish he was at home," said Peggy. "But I must go, now my frock's cleaned. Some day p'raps I'll come again. Thank you, Reddy," at which Rebecca, who had been vigorously rubbing Peggy's skirts, stared and looked as if she were going to say "Lor'!" "I'm going to buy soap-bubble pipes at Mrs. Whelan's," Peggy went on, for she was losing her shyness now; "that's what I comed out in the rain for. We're going to play at soap-bubbles this afternoon, 'cos it's too wet to go out a walk."

All the Smileys listened with great interest.

"Mayn't Brown—I mean Matilda-Jane—come with me, pelease?" said Peggy. "I'm *razer* frightened to go to buy them alone; sometimes that old woman does look so cross."

"She looks what she is then," said Reddy, "'cept for one thing; she's awful good to Lizzie. She's a-sittin' down there this very minute as is, is Lizzie, to be out o' the way like when mother and me's cleaning, you see, miss."

Brown Smiley's face had grown grave.

"I dursn't let Mother Whelan see as I've not gone," she said, "but if missy doesn't like to go alone—not as she'd be sharp to the likes of you, but still——"

"*I'll* go," said little Sarah, Light Smiley, that is to say. "Jest you see to the childer will ye, Mary-Hann?" she shouted to the deaf sister. "I won't be harf a minute."

"And you, Matilda-Jane, off with you," said Rebecca, which advice Brown Smiley instantly followed.

Sarah took Peggy's hand to escort her down the dark staircase again. Light Smiley was, of all the family perhaps, Peggy's favourite. She was two years or so older than her little opposite neighbour, but she scarcely looked it, for both she and Brown Smiley were small and slight, and when you came to speak to them both, Sarah seemed a good deal younger than Matilda; she was so much less

managing and decided in manner, but on the present occasion Peggy would have preferred the elder Smiley, for to tell the truth her heart was beginning to beat much faster than usual at the thought of facing Mrs. Whelan in her den.

"Isn't you frightened, Light Smiley?" asked the little girl when the two stopped, and Peggy knew by this that they must be at the old woman's door.

"Oh no," Sarah replied. "Tisn't as if we'd been up to any mischief, you see. And Lizzie's there. She's mostly quiet when Lizzie's there."

So saying she pushed the door open. It had a bell inside, which forthwith began to tinkle loudly, and made Peggy start. This bell was the pride of Mrs. Whelan's heart; it made such a distinction, she thought, between her and the rest of the tenants of the house, and the more noisily it rang the better pleased she was. Sarah knew this, and gave the door a good shove, at the same time pulling Peggy into the room.

"What's it yer afther now, and what's become of Matilda-Jane?" called out the old woman, not, at the first moment, catching sight of Peggy.

"It's little missy from over-the-way," Sarah

hastened to explain; "she's come to buy some pipes of you, Mother Whelan."

Mrs. Whelan looked at Peggy where she stood behind Sarah, gravely staring about her.

"To be sure," she said in her most gracious tone. "'Tis the beautiful pipes I have. And 'tis proud I am to say the purty young lady," and on she went with a long flattering speech about Peggy's likeness to her "swate mother," and inquiries after the lady's health, all the time she was reaching down from a high shelf an old broken cardboard box, containing her stock of clay pipes.

Peggy did not answer. In the first place, thanks to the old woman's Irish accent and queer way of speaking she did not understand a quarter of what she said. Then her eyes were busy gazing all about, and her nose was even less pleasantly occupied, for there was a very strong smell in the room. It was a sort of mixed smell of everything—not like the curious "everything" smell that one knows so well in a village shop in the country, which for my part I think rather nice—a smell of tea, and coffee, and bacon, and nuts, and soap, and matting, and brown holland, and spices, and dried herbs, all mixed together, but with a clean feeling about it—no, the

"To be sure," she said in her most gracious tone. 'Tis the beautiful pipes I have. And 'tis proud I am to say the purty young lady," and on she went with a long flattering speech about Peggy's likeness to her "swate mother," and inquiries after the lady's health, all the time she was reaching down from a high shelf an old broken cardboard box, containing her stock of clay pipes.'

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smell in Mrs. Whelan's was much stuffier and snuffier. For joined to the odour of all the things I have named was that of herrings and tobacco smoke, and, I rather fear, of whisky. And besides all this, I am very much afraid that not only a spring cleaning, but a summer or autumn or winter cleaning, were unknown events in the old woman's room. No wonder that Peggy, fresh from the soft-soap-and-water smell of the Simpkins's upstairs, sniffed uneasily and wished Mrs. Whelan would be quick with the pipes; her head felt so queer and confused.

But looking round she caught sight of a very interesting object; this was Lizzie, rocking herself gently on her chair in a corner, and seeming quite at home. Peggy ran—no she couldn't run—the room was so crowded, for a counter stood across one end, and in the other a big square old bedstead, and between the two were a table and one or two chairs, and an old tumble-down chest of drawers—made her way over to Lizzie.

"How do you do, Crip—Lizzie, I mean? I hope your pains aren't very bad to-day?"

"Not so very, thank you, miss," said the poor girl. "It's nice and quiet in here, and the quiet does me a deal o' good."

Peggy sighed.

"I don't like being very quiet," she said. "I wish you could come over to the nursery; now that Hal and baby and nurse are away it's dreffully quiet."

"But you wouldn't care to change places with me, would you, missy?" said Lizzie. "I'm thinking you'd have noise enough if you were upstairs sometimes. My—it do go through one's head, to be sure."

Peggy looked very sympathising.

"Aren't you frightened of *her?*" she whispered, nodding gently towards Mrs. Whelan.

"Not a bit of it," said Lizzie, also lowering her voice; "she's right down good to me, is the old body. She do scold now and then and no mistake, but bless you, she'd never lay a finger on me, and it's no wonder she's in a taking with the children when they kicks up a hextra row, so to say."

Peggy's mouth had opened gradually during this speech, and now it remained so. She could not understand half Lizzie's words, but she had no time to ask for an explanation, for just then Light Smiley called to her to come and look at the pipes which were by this time waiting for her on the counter.

They were the cleanest things in the room—the only clean things it seemed to Peggy as she lifted them up one by one to choose six very nice ones. And then she paid her pennies and ran back to shake hands with Lizzie and say good-bye to her—she wondered if she should shake hands with Mrs. Whelan too, but fortunately the old woman did not seem to expect it, and Peggy felt very thankful, for her brown wrinkled hands looked sadly dirty to the little girl, dirtier perhaps than they really were.

"I like your house much better than hers," said Peggy, when she and Light Smiley were down at the bottom of the stairs again; "it smells much nicer."

"Mother and Rebecca's all for scrubbing, that's certing," replied Sarah, with a smile of pleasure—of course all little girls like to hear their homes praised—"but she's not bad to Lizzie, is old Whelan," as if that settled the whole question, and Peggy felt she must not say any more about the dirty room.

Light Smiley felt it her duty to see "missy" safe across the street. Peggy's hands were laden with the precious pipes, and Sarah carried the big umbrella over the two of them. They chattered as they picked their way through the mud and stood for a

minute or two at the yard-door of Peggy's house. Light Smiley peeped in.

"Lor'," she said, expressing her feelings in the same way as her sisters, "yours must be a fine house, missy. All that there back-yard for yerselves."

"You should see the droind-room, and mamma's room; there's a marble top to the washing-stand," said Peggy, with pride.

"Lor'," said Sarah again.

"Some day," Peggy went on, excited by Sarah's admiration, "*some* day when my mamma comes home, I'm going to ask her to let me have a tea-party of you *all*—in the nursery, you know. The nursery's nice too, at least I daresay you'd like it."

"Is that the winder where you sees us from?" asked Sarah. "Matilda-Jane says as how we could see you too quite plain at it if you put your face quite close to the glass."

"I can't," said Peggy. "There's the toilet-table close to the window—at least, it's really a chest of drawers, you know, but there's a looking-glass on the top and a white cover, so it's like a toilet-table for nurse, though it's too high up for me. I have to stand on a chair if I want to see myself popperly."

"Dear!" said Sarah sympathisingly.

"And I can only see you by scrooging into the corner, and the curting's there. No, you couldn't ever see me well up at the window. But that's not the nursery where we'd have tea. That's only the night nursery. The other one's to the front; that's the window where you can see the hills far away."

"In the country, where father used to live. Oh yes, I know. I heerd Matilda-Jane a-asking 'im about it," said Sarah.

"Oh, and did he tell you any more? Do ask him if it's really not far to get there," said Peggy, eagerly.

Sarah nodded.

"I won't forget," she said; "and then, missy, when you axes us to the tea-party, I'll be able to tell you all about it."

She did not mean to be cunning, poor little girl, but she was rather afraid Peggy might forget about the tea-party, and she thought it was not a bad plan to say something which might help to make her remember it.

"Yes," Peggy replied, "that would be lovely. Do make him tell all you can, Light Smiley. Oh, I do wish mamma would come home now, and I'd

ask her about the tea-party immediately. I'm sure she'd let me, for she likes us to be kind to poor people."

Sarah drew herself up a little at this.

"We're not—not to say *poor* folk," she said, with some dignity. "There's a many of us, and it's hard enough work, but still——"

"Oh, don't be vexed," said Peggy. "I know you're not like—like beggars, you know. And I think *we're* rather poor too. Mamma often says papa has to work hard."

Sarah grew quite friendly again.

"I take it folks isn't often rich when they've a lot of children," she began, but the sound of a window opening across the street made her start. "Bless me," she said, "I must run. There's Rebecca a-going to scold me for standing talking. Good-bye, miss, I'll not forget to ask father."

And Sarah darted away, carrying with her the umbrella, quite forgetting that it was Peggy's. Peggy forgot it too, and it was not raining so fast now, so there was less to remind her. She shut the door and ran across the yard. The house door still stood open, and she made her way up to the nursery without meeting any one.

CHAPTER X

"SOAP-BUBBLING"

"And every colour see I there."
The Rainbow, CHARLES LAMB.

THERE was no one upstairs. Miss Earnshaw had gone down to the kitchen to iron the seams of her work, without giving special thought to Peggy. If any one had asked her where the child was she would have probably answered that she was counting over her money in the night nursery. So she was rather surprised when coming upstairs again in a few minutes she was met by Peggy flying to meet her with the pipes in her hand.

"I've got them, Miss Earnshaw; aren't they beauties?" she cried. "And I don't think my frock's reely spoilt? It only just looks a *little* funny where the mud was."

"Bless me!" exclaimed the young dressmaker,

"wherever have you been, Miss Peggy? No, your frock 'll brush all right; but you don't mean to say you've been out in the rain? You should have asked me, my dear."

She spoke rather reproachfully; she was a little vexed with herself for not having looked after the child better, but Peggy was one of those quiet "old-fashioned" children, who never seem to need looking after.

"I did ask you," said Peggy, opening wide her eyes, "and you said, 'Very well, my dear.'"

Miss Earnshaw couldn't help smiling.

"I must have been thinking more of your new frock than of yourself," she said. "However, I hope it's done you no harm. Your stockings aren't wet?"

"Oh no," said Peggy; "my slippers were a weeny bit wet, so I've changed them. My frock wouldn't have been dirtied, only I felled in the wet, Miss Earnshaw, but Brown—one of the little girls, you know, that lives in the house where the shop is—picked me up, and there's no harm done, is there? And I've got the pipes, and won't my brothers be peleased," she chirruped on in her soft, cheery way.

Miss Earnshaw could not blame her, though she

determined to be more on the look-out for the future. And soon after came twelve o'clock, and then the young dressmaker was obliged to go, bidding Peggy "Good-bye till Monday morning."

The boys came home wet and hungry, and grumbling a good deal at the rainy half-holiday. Peggy had hidden the six pipes in her little bed, but after dinner she made the three boys shut their eyes while she fetched them out and laid them in a row on the table. Then, "You may look now," she said; "it's my apprise," and she stood at one side to enjoy the sight of their pleasure.

"Hurrah," cried Terry, "pipes for soap-bubbles! Isn't it jolly? Isn't Peggy a brick?"

"Dear Peggy," said Baldwin, holding up his plump face for a kiss.

"Poor old Peg-top," said Thor, patronisingly. "They seem very good pipes; and as there's six of them, you and I can break one a-piece if we like, Terry, without its mattering."

Peggy looked rather anxious at this.

"Don't try to break them, Thor, pelease," she said; "for if you beginned breaking it might go on, and then it would be all spoilt like the last time, for there's no fun in soap-bubbling by turns."

"No, that's quite true," said Terry. "You remember the last time how stupid it was. But of course we won't break any, 'specially as they're yours, Peggy. We'll try and keep them good for another time."

"Did you spend all your pennies for them?" asked Baldwin, sympathisingly.

"Not quite all," said Peggy. "I choosed them myself," she went on, importantly. "There was a lot in a box."

"Why, where did you get them? You didn't go yourself to old Whelan's, surely?" asked Thor, sharply.

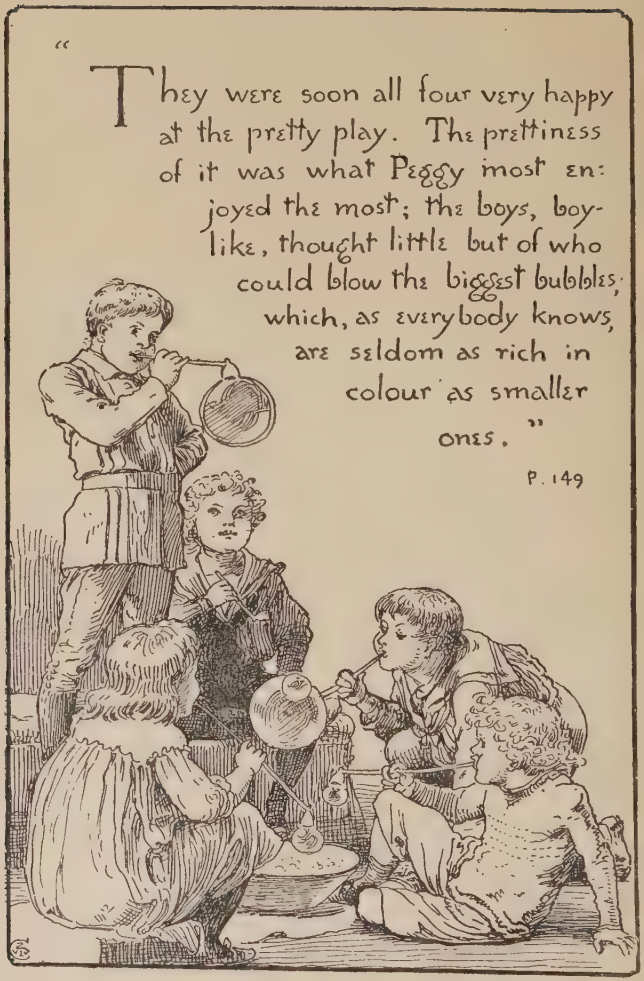
"Yes, I runned across the road," said Peggy. "You always get them there, Thor."

"But it's quite different. I can tell you mamma won't be very pleased when she comes home to hear you've been so disobedient."

Poor Peggy's face, so bright and happy, clouded over, and she seemed on the point of bursting into tears.

"I weren't disobedient," she began. "Miss Earnshaw said, 'Very well, dear,' and so I thought——"

"Of course," interrupted Terry; "Peggy's never disobedient, Thor. We'll ask mamma when she comes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They were soon all four very happy at the pretty play. The prettiness of it was what Peggy most enjoyed the most; the boys, boy-like, thought little but of who could blow the biggest bubbles, which, as everybody knows, are seldom as rich in colour as smaller ones."
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home; but she won't be vexed with you, darling. You won't need to go again before then."

"No," said Peggy, comforted, "I don't want to go again, Terry dear. It doesn't smell very nice in the shop. But the *children's* house is very clean, Terry. I'm sure mamma would let us go *there*."

"Those Simpkinses over old Whelan's," said Terry. "Oh yes, I know mother goes there herself sometimes, though as for that she goes to old Whelan's too. But we're wasting time; let's ask Fanny for a tin basin and lots of soap."

They were soon all four very happy at the pretty play. The prettiness of it was what Peggy enjoyed the most; the boys, boy-like, thought little but of who could blow the biggest bubbles, which, as everybody knows, are seldom as rich in colour as smaller ones.

"I like the rainbowiest ones best," said Peggy. "I don't care for those 'normous ones Thor makes. Do you, Baldwin?"

Baldwin stopped to consider.

"I suppose very big things aren't never so pretty as littler things," he said at last, when a sort of grunt from Terry interrupted him. Terry could not speak, his cheeks were all puffed out round the pipe, and he

dared not stop blowing. He could only grunt and nod his head sharply to catch their attention to the wonderful triumph in soap-bubbles floating before his nose. There was a big one, as big as any of Thorold's, and up on the top of it a lovely every-coloured wee one, the most brilliant the children had ever seen—a real rainbow ball.

They all clapped their hands, at least Peggy and Baldwin did so. Thorold shouted, "Hurrah for Terry's new invention. It's like a monkey riding on an elephant." But Peggy did not think that was a pretty idea.

"It's more like one of the very little stars sitting on the sun's knee," was her comparison, which Baldwin corrected to the moon—the sun was too yellow, he said, to be like a no-colour bubble.

Then they all set to work to try to make double-bubbles, and Thor actually managed to make three, one on the top of the other. And Terry made a very big one run ever so far along the carpet without breaking, bobbing and dancing along as he blew it ever so gently.

And as a finish-up they all four put their pipes into the basin and blew together, making what they called "bubble-pudding," till the pudding seemed to

get angry and gurgled and wobbled itself up so high that it ended by toppling over, and coming to an untimely end as a little spot of soapy water on the table.

"Pride must have a fall, you see," said Thor.

"It's like the story of the frog that tried to be as big as an ox," said Terence, at which they all laughed as a very good joke.

Altogether Peggy's pipes turned out a great success, and the rainy afternoon passed very happily.

The Sunday that came after that Saturday was showery, sunny, and rainy by turns, like a child who having had a great fit of crying and sobbing can't get over it all at once, and keeps breaking into little bursts of tears again, long after the sorrow is all over. But by Monday morning the world—Peggy's world, that is to say—seemed to have quite recovered its spirits. The sun came out smiling with pleasure, and even the town birds, who know so little about trees, and grass, and flowers, and all those delightful things, hopped about and chirruped as nicely as could be. The boys set off to school in good spirits, and while Fanny was taking down the breakfast-things Peggy got out the little red shoes, and set them on the window-sill, where they had not been for several days.

"There, dear little red shoes," she said, softly, "you may look out again at the pretty sun and the sky, and the fairy cottage up on the mounting. You can see it quite plain to-day, dear little shoes. The clouds is all gone away, and it's shinin' out all white and beautiful, and I daresay the mamma's standin' at the door with the baby—or p'raps," Peggy was never very partial to the baby, "it's asleep in its cradle. Yes, I think that's it. And the hens and cocks and chickens is all pecking about, and the cows moo'in. Oh, *how* I do wish we could go and see them all, don't you, dear little shoes?"

She stood gazing up at the tiny white speck, to other eyes almost invisible, as if by much gazing it would grow nearer and clearer to her; there was a smile on her little face, sweet visions floated before Peggy's mind of a day, "some day," when mamma should take her out "to the country," to see for herself the lovely and delightful sights that same dear mamma had described.

Suddenly Fanny's voice brought her back to present things. Fanny was looking rather troubled.

"Miss Peggy, love," she said, "cook and I can't think what's making Miss Earnshaw so late this morning. She's always so sharp to her time. I

don't like leaving you alone, but I don't know what else to do. Monday's the orkardest day, for we're always so busy downstairs, and your papa was just saying this morning that I was to tell Miss Earnshaw to take you a nice long walk towards the country, seeing as it's so fine a day. It will be right down tiresome, it will, if she don't come."

"Never mind, Fanny," said Peggy. "I don't mind much being alone, and I daresay Miss Earnshaw will come. I *should* like to go a nice walk to-day," she could not help adding, with a longing glance out at the sunny sky.

"To be sure you would," said Fanny, "and it stands to reason as you won't be well if you don't get no fresh air. I hope to goodness the girl will come, but I doubt it—her mother's ill maybe, and she's no one to send. Well, dear, you'll try and amuse yourself, and I'll get on downstairs as fast as I can."

Peggy went back to the window and stood there for a minute or two, feeling rather sad. It did seem hard that things should go so very "contrarily" sometimes.

"Just when it's such a fine day," she thought, "Miss Earnshaw doesn't come. And on Saturday when we *couldn't* have goned a walk she did come.

Only on Saturday it did rain very badly in the afternoon and she didn't stay, so that wasn't a pity."

Then her thoughts went wandering off to what the dressmaker had told her of having to go a long way out into the country on Saturday afternoon, and of how wet and muddy the lanes would be. Peggy sighed; she *couldn't* believe country lanes could ever be anything but delightful.

"Oh how *very* pretty they must be to-day," she said to herself, "with all the little flowers coming peeping out, and the birds singing, and the cocks and hens, and the cows, and—and——" she was becoming a little confused. Indeed she wasn't *quite* sure what a "lane" really meant—she knew it was some kind of a way to walk along, but she had heard the word "path" too,—were "lane" and "path" quite the same? she wondered. And while she was wondering and gazing out of the window, she was startled all of a sudden by a soft, faint tap at the door. So soft and faint that if it had been at the window instead of at the door it might have been taken for the flap of a sparrow's wing as it flew past. Peggy stood quite still and listened; she heard nothing more, and was beginning to think it must have been her fancy,

when again it came, and this time rather more loudly. "Tap, tap." Yes, "certingly," thought Peggy, "there's somebody there."

She felt a little, a *very* little frightened.

Should she go to the door and peep out, or should she call "Come in"? she asked herself. And one or two of the "ogre" stories that Thorold and Terry were so fond of in their "Grimm's Tales," *would* keep coming into her head—stories of little princesses shut up alone, or of giants prowling about to find a nice tender child for supper. Peggy shivered. But after all what was the use of standing there fancying things? It was broad, sunny daylight—not at all the time for ogres or such-like to be abroad. Peggy began to laugh at her own silliness.

"Very likely," she thought, "it's Miss Earnshaw playing me a trick to 'apprise me, 'cos she's so late this morning."

This idea quite took away her fear.

"It's you, Miss Earnshaw, I'm quite sure it's you," she called out; "come in quick, you funny Miss Earnshaw. Come in."

But though the door slowly opened, no Miss Earnshaw appeared. Peggy began to think this was carrying fun too far.

"Why don't you come in quick?" she said, her voice beginning to tremble a little.

The door opened a little farther.

"Missy," said a low voice, a childish hesitating voice, quite different from Miss Earnshaw's quick bright way of speaking, "Missy, please, it's me, Sarah, please, miss."

And the door opened more widely, and in came, slowly and timidly still, a small figure well known to Peggy. It was none other than Light Smiley.

Peggy could hardly speak. She was so very much astonished.

"Light Smiley—Sarah, I mean," she exclaimed, "how did you come? Did you see Fanny? Did she tell you to come upstairs?"

Sarah shook her head.

"I don't know who Fanny is, missy. I just comed in of myself. The doors was both open, and I didn't meet nobody. I didn't like for to ring or knock. I thought mebbe your folk'd scold if I did —a gel like me. Mother knows I've comed; she said as how I'd better bring it myself."

And she held up what Peggy had not noticed that she was carrying—the big umbrella that had caused so much trouble two days before.

"The numbrella," cried Peggy. "Oh thank you, Sarah, for bringing it back. I never thought of it! How stupid it was of me."

"Mother told me for to bring it to the door and give it in," Sarah went on. "I didn't mean to come upstairs, but, the door was open, you see, miss, and I knowed your nussery was at the top, and—I 'ope it's not a liberty."

"No, no," said Peggy, her hospitable feelings awaking to see that her little visitor was still standing timidly in the doorway, "I'm *very* glad you've comed. You don't know how glad I am. It's so lonely all by myself—Miss Earnshaw hasn't come this morning. Come in, Light Smiley, do come in. Oh how nice! I can show you the mountings and the little white cottage shining in the sun."

She drew Sarah forwards. But before the child looked out of the window, her eyes were caught by the tiny red slippers on the sill.

"Lor'," she said breathlessly, "what splendid shoes! Are they for—for your dolly, missy? They're too small for a baby, bain't they?"

"Oh yes," said Peggy, "they're too small for our baby, a great deal. But then he's very fat."

"They'd be too small for ours too, though she's

not a hextra fine child for her age. She were a very poor specimint for a good bit, mother says, but she's pickin' up now she's got some teeth through. My—but them shoes is neat, to be sure! They must be for a dolly."

"*I've* no doll they'd do for," said Peggy, "but I like them just for theirselves. I always put them to stand there on a fine day; they like to look out of the window."

Sarah stared at Peggy as if she thought she was rather out of her mind!—indeed the children at the back had hinted to each other that missy, for all she was a real little lady, was very funny-like sometimes. But Peggy was quite unconscious of it.

"Lor'," said Sarah at last, "how can shoes see, they've no eyes, missy?"

"But you can *fancy* they have. Don't you ever play in your mind at fancying?" asked Peggy. "I think it's the nicest part of being alive, and mamma says it's no harm if we keep remembering it's not real. But never mind about that—do look at the hills, Sarah, and oh, *can* you see the white speck shining in the sun? *That's* the cottage—I call it my cottage, but *p'raps*," rather unwillingly, "it's the one your papa lived in when he was little."

"D'ye really think so?" said Sarah, eagerly. "It's Brackenshire over there to be sure, and father's 'ome was up an 'ill—deary me, to think as it might be the very place. See it—to be sure I do, as plain as plain. It do seem a good bit off, but father he says it's no more'n a tidy walk. He's almost promised he'll take some on us there some fine day when he's an 'oliday. I axed 'im all I could think of—missy—all about the cocks and 'ens and cows and pigses."

"Not pigs," interrupted Peggy. "I don't like pigs, and I won't have them in my cottage."

"I wasn't a-talking of your cottage," said Sarah, humbly. "'Twas what father told us of all the things he seed in the country when he were a boy there. There's lots of pigses in Brackenshire."

"Never mind. We won't have any," persisted Peggy. "But oh, Light Smiley, do look how splendid the sky is—all blue and all so shiny. I never sawed such a lovely day. I would so like to go a walk."

"And why shouldn't you?" asked Sarah.

"There's no one to take me," sighed Peggy. "It's Monday, and Fanny's very busy on Mondays, and I told you that tiresome Miss Earnshaw's not comed."

Sarah considered a little.

"Tell you what, missy," she said, "why shouldn't we—you and me—go a walk? I'm sure mother 'd let me. I've got my 'at, all 'andy, and I did say to mother if so as missy seed me I might stop a bit, and she were quite agreeable. I'm a deal older nor you, and I can take care of you nicely. Mother's training me for the nussery."

Peggy started up in delight. She had been half sitting on the window-sill, beside the shoes.

"Oh, Light Smiley," she said, "how lovely! Of course you could take care of me. We'd go up Fernley Road, straight up — that's the way to Brackenshire, you know, and p'raps we might go far enough to see the white cottage plainer. If it's not a very long way to get there, we'd be sure to see it much plainer if we walked a mile or two. A mile isn't very far. Oh, do let's go—quick! quick!"

But Sarah stopped her.

"You'd best tell your folks first, missy," she said. "They'll let you go and be glad of it, I should say, if they're so busy, and seein' as they let you come over to our 'ouse, and your mar knowin' us and all."

"It was Miss Earnshaw that let me go," said Peggy, "and then she said she didn't know I'd goned. And Thor said — oh no, he only said I

shouldn't have goned to the shop. But I'll ask Fanny—I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll put on my boots and my hat and jacket—you shall help me, Sarah, and then we'll go down and I'll call to Fanny from the top of the kitchen stairs and ask her if I may go out with you, Sarah, dear. I'm sure she'll say I may."

So the two little maidens went into the night nursery, where Light Smiley was greatly interested in looking at her own dwelling-place from other people's windows, and quite in her element too, seeing that she was being trained for the nursery, in getting out Peggy's walking things, buttoning her boots, and all the rest of it.

CHAPTER XI

UP FERNLEY ROAD

"But the way is long and toilsome,
And the road is drear and hard;
Little heads and hearts are aching,
Little feet with thorns are scarred."
The Children's Journey.

LIGHT SMILEY kept looking round the room with great satisfaction.

"It is nice in 'ere and no mistake," she said at last. "Your 'ats and coats and frocks all in a row, as neat as neat, and these little white beds a sight to be seen. I should love for Rebecca and Matilda-Jane to see it."

"They will," said Peggy, "when I avite you all to a tea-party, you know."

Sarah drew a deep breath. A tea-party in these beautiful nurseries seemed almost too good ever to come true.

"Is there a many nusseries as nice as this 'un, do you think, missy? I do 'ope as I'll get into a nice one when I'm big enough. One 'ud take a pride in keeping it clean and tidy."

"I don't think this is at all a *grand* one," Peggy replied. "Mamma's was much grander when she was little, I know. But, of course, she's very pertickler, and so's nurse, about it being very tidy."

And then, Peggy being ready, the quaint pair of friends took each other's hands and set off to the top of the kitchen stairs.

"Should we take the humberellar?" said Sarah, suddenly stopping at the foot of the first little flight of stairs. "I don't think it looks any ways like rain, still one never knows, and I can carry it easy."

In her heart she hoped Peggy would say yes. For to Sarah's eyes the clumsy umbrella was a very "genteel" one indeed, and she felt as if it would add distinction to their appearance.

Peggy, not looking at it from this point of view, hesitated.

"P'raps it would do to keep the sun off us," she said. "My parasol's wored out, so I can't take it. Mamma's going to get me a new one."

Sarah ran back and fetched the umbrella.

When they got to the door at the top of the kitchen stairs, Peggy opened it and called down softly, "Fanny, are you there? Can you hear me?" for she was not allowed to go down to the kitchen by herself.

But no one answered. Fanny was busy washing in the back kitchen with both doors shut to keep in the steam, and the cook had gone out to the butcher's.

"Fanny," called Peggy again.

Then a voice came at last in return.

"Is it anything I can tell the cook when she comes in, please, miss?" and a boy came forward out of the kitchen and stood at the foot of the steep stone stairs. "I'm the baker's boy, and I met cook and she told me to wait; she'd be back with change to pay the book in a minute. There's no one here."

Peggy turned to Sarah in distress.

"Fanny must be out too," she said.

"Well, it'll be all right if the boy 'ull tell her, won't it, missy? 'Tisn't the cook," she went on, speaking to the boy herself, "'tis t'other one. Jest you tell her when she comes in that miss has gone out a little walk with me—Sarah Simpkins—she'll know. I'll take good care of missy."

"All right," said the boy, with no doubt that so it was, and thinking, if he thought at all, that Sarah Simpkins must be a little nurse-girl, or something of the kind about the house, though certainly a small specimen to be in service! He whistled as he turned away, and something in the cheerful sound of his whistle helped to satisfy Peggy that all *was* right!

"He's a nice boy," she said to Sarah. "He won't forget, will he?"

"Not he," Sarah replied. "He'll tell 'em fast enough. And as like as not we'll meet 'em along the street as we go. Is Webb's your butcher, missy —'tis just at the corner of Fernley Road?"

Peggy shook her head.

"I don't know," she said, feeling rather ashamed of her ignorance; "but I'd like to meet Fanny, so, pelease, let us go that way."

And off the two set, by the front door this time, quite easy in their minds though, as far as they knew, the baker's boy was the only guardian of the house.

They trotted down the street in the sunshine; it was very bright and fine—the air, even there in the smoky town, felt this morning deliciously fresh and spring-like.

"How nice it is," said Peggy, drawing a deep breath; "it's just like summer. I'd like to go a quite long walk, wouldn't you, Sarah?"

Light Smiley looked about her approvingly.

"Yes," she said, "I does enjoy a real fine day. And in the country it must be right-down fust-rate."

"Oh, the country!" said Peggy; "oh dear, how I do wish we could go as far as the country!"

"Well," said Sarah, "if we walk fast we might come within sight of it. There's nice trees and gardings up Fernley Road, and that's a sort of country, isn't it, missy?"

They were at the corner of the road by this time, but there was no sign of Fanny or cook. "Webb's" shop stood a little way down the other side, but as far as they could see it was empty.

"P'raps your folk don't deal there," said Sarah, to which Peggy had nothing to say, and they stood looking about them in an uncertain kind of way.

"We may as well go on a bit," said Sarah at last, "that there boy's sure to tell."

Peggy had no objection, and they set off along Fernley Road at a pretty brisk pace.

They had not very far to go before, as Sarah said, the road grew less town-like; the houses had little

gardens round them, some of which were prettily kept, and after a while they came to a field or two, not yet built upon, though great placards stuck up on posts told that they were waiting to be sold for that purpose. They were very towny sort of fields certainly, still the bright spring sunshine made the best of them as of everything else this morning, and the two children looked at them with pleasure.

"There's nicer fields still, a bit farther on," said Sarah. "I've been along this 'ere road several times. It goes on and on right into the country."

"I know," said Peggy, "it goes on into the country of the mountings. But, Sarah," she said, stopping short, and looking rather distressed, "I don't think we see them any plainer than from the nursery window, and the white cottage doesn't look even as plain. Are you sure we're going the right way?"

"We couldn't go wrong," answered Sarah, "there's no other way. But we've come no distance yet, missy, and you see there's ups and downs in the road that comes between us and the 'ills somehow. I suppose at the window we could see straight-forward-like, and then we was 'igher up."

"Yes, that must be it," said Peggy; "but I would

like to go far enough to see a *little* plainer, Sarah, wouldn't you? I've got the red shoes in my pocket, you know, and when we come to a place where we can see very nice and clear I'll take them out and let them see too."

"Lor'," said Sarah, "you *are* funny, missy."

But she smiled so good-naturedly that Peggy did not mind.

After a bit they came to a place where another road crossed the one they were on. This other road was planted with trees along one side, and the shade they cast looked cool and tempting.

"I wish we could go along that way," said Peggy, "but it would be the wrong way. It doesn't go on to the mountings."

Sarah did not answer for a minute. She was trying to spell out some letters that were painted up on the corner of a wall, which enclosed the garden of a house standing in the road they were looking down.

"'B, R, A,'" she began, "'B, R, A, C, K:' it's it, just look, missy. Bain't that Brackenshire as large as life? 'Brackenshire Road.' It must be this way," and she looked quite delighted.

"But how can it be?" objected Peggy. "This

road *doesn't* go to the hills, Sarah. They're straight in front."

"But maybe it slopes round again after a bit," said Sarah. "Lots of roads does that way, and runs the same way really, though you wouldn't think so at the start. It stands to reason, when it's got the name painted up, it must lead Brackenshire way;" and then suddenly, as a man with a basket on his arm appeared coming out of one of the houses, she darted up to him.

"Please, mister, does this road lead to Brackenshire?" she asked.

The man did not look very good-natured.

"Lead to where?" he said, gruffly.

"To Brackenshire—it's painted up on the wall, but we want to be sure."

"If it's painted up on the wall, what's the sense of askin' me?" he said. "If you go far enough no doubt you'll get there. There's more'n one road to Brackenshire."

Sarah was quite satisfied.

"You see," she said to Peggy, running back to her, "it's all right. If we go along this 'ere road a bit, I 'specs it'll turn again and then we'll see the 'ills straight in front."

Peggy had no objection. Fernley Road was bare and glaring just about there, and the trees were very tempting.

"It's really getting like the country," said Peggy, as they passed several pretty gardens, larger and much prettier than the small ones in Fernley Road.

"Yes," Light Smiley agreed, "but though gardings is nice, I don't hold with gardings anything like as much as fields. Fields *is* splendid where you can race about and jump and do just as you like, and no fears of breakin' flowers or nothink."

"Do you think we shall come to fields like that soon?" said Peggy. "If there was a very nice one we might go into it p'raps and rest a little, and look at the mountings. I wish we could begin to see the mountings again, Sarah, it seems quite strange without them, and I'm getting rather tired of looking at gardens when we can't go inside them, aren't you?"

Sarah was feeling very contented and happy. She was, though a little body for her age, much stronger than Peggy, as well as two years older, and she looked at her companion with surprise when she began already to talk of "resting."

"Lor', missy, you bain't tired already," she was

beginning, when she suddenly caught sight of something which made her interrupt herself. This was another road crossing the one they were on at right angles, and running therefore in the same direction as Fernley Road again. "'Ere's our way," she cried, "now didn't I tell you so? And this way goes slopin' up a bit, you see. When we get to the top we'll see the 'ills straight 'afore us, and 'ave a beeyutiful view."

Peggy's rather flagging steps grew brisker at this, and the two ran gaily along the new road for a little way. But running uphill is tiring, and it seemed to take them a long time to get to the top of the slope, and when they did so, it was only to be disappointed. Neither mountains nor hills nor white cottage were to be seen, only before them a rather narrow sort of lane, sloping downwards now and seeming to lead into some rather rough waste ground, where it ended. Peggy's face grew rather doleful, but Sarah was quite equal to the occasion. A little down the hill she spied a stile, over which she persuaded Peggy to climb. They found themselves in a potato field, but a potato field with a path down the middle; it was a large field and at the other end of the path was a gate, opening on to

a cart track scarcely worthy the name of a lane. The children followed it, however, till another stile tempted them again, this time into a little wood, where they got rather torn and scratched by brambles and nettles as they could not easily find a path, and Sarah fancied by forcing their way through the bushes they would be sure to come out on to the road again.

It was not, however, till they had wandered backwards among the trees and brambles for some time that they got on to a real path, and they had to walk a good way along this till they at last came on another gate, this time sure enough opening into the high road.

Sarah's spirits recovered at once.

"'Ere we are," she said cheerfully, "all right. 'Ere's Fernley Road again. Nothink to do but to turn round and go 'ome if you're tired, missy. *I'm* not tired, but if you'd raythor go no farther——"

Peggy did not answer for a moment; she was staring about her on all sides. The prospect was not a very inviting one; the road was bare and ugly, dreadfully dusty, and there was no shade anywhere, and at a little distance some great tall chimneys were to be seen, the chimneys of some iron-works.

from which smoke poured forth. There were a good many little houses near the tall chimneys, they were the houses of the people who worked there, but they were not sweet little cottages such as Peggy dreamed of. Indeed they looked more like a very small ugly town, than like rows of cottages on a country road.

"This isn't a pretty road at all," said Peggy at last, rather crossly I am afraid, "it is very nugly, and you shouldn't have brought me here, Sarah. I can't see the mountings; they is quite goned away, more goned away than when it rains, for then they're only behind the clouds. This isn't Fernley Road, Light Smiley. I do believe you've losted us, and Peggy's so tired, and very, very un'appy."

It was Peggy's way when she grew low-spirited to speak more babyishly than usual; at such times it was too much trouble to think about being a big girl. Poor Sarah looked dreadfully distressed.

"Oh, missy dear, don't cry," she said. "If it bain't Fernley Road, it's *a* road any way, and there's no call to be frightened. We can ax our way, but I'd rayther not ax it at the cottages, for they might think I was a tramp that 'd stoled you away."

"And what would they do then?" asked Peggy, leaving off crying for a minute.

"They'd 'av me up mebbe, and put us in the lock-ups."

"What's that?"

"The place where the pl'ice leaves folk as they isn't sure about."

"Prison, do you mean?" said Peggy, growing very pale.

"Well, not ezackly, but somethin' like."

Peggy caught hold of Sarah in sudden terror.

"Oh come along, Light Smiley, quick, quick. Let's get back into the fields and hide or anything. Oh come quick, for fear they should catch us." And she tugged at Sarah, trying to drag her along the road.

"Stop, missy, don't take on so; there's no need. We'll just go along quietly and no one'll notice us, only you stop crying, and then no one'll think any 'arm. We'll not go back the way we came, it's so drefful thorny, but we'll look out for another road or a path. I 'spects you're right enough—this 'ere bain't Fernley Road."

Peggy swallowed down her sobs.

"I don't think you look quite big enough to have stolened me, Sarah," she said at last. "But I would like to get back into the fields quick. If only we

could see the mountings again, I wouldn't be quite so frightened."

They had not gone far before they came upon a gateway and a path leading through a field where there seemed no difficulties. Crossing it they found themselves at the edge of the thorny wood, which they skirted for some way. Peggy's energy, born of fear, began to fail.

"Sarah," she said at last, bursting into fresh tears, "Peggy can't go no farther, and I'm so hungry too. I'm sure it's long past dinner-time. You must sit down and rest; p'raps if I rested a little, I wouldn't feel so very un'appy."

Sarah looked at her almost in despair. She herself was worried and vexed, very afraid too of the scolding which certainly awaited her at home, but she was not tired nor dispirited, though very sorry for Peggy, and quite aware that it was she and not 'missy" who was to blame for this unlucky expedition.

"I'd like to get on," she said, "we're sure to get back into a road as'll take us 'ome before long. Couldn't I carry you, missy?"

"No," said Peggy, "you're far too little. And I can't walk any more without resting. You're very

unkind, Light Smiley, and I wish I'd never seen you."

Poor Sarah bore this bitter reproach in silence.

She looked about for a comfortable seat in the hedge, and settled herself so that Peggy could rest against her. The sunshine, though it had seemed hot and glaring on the bare dusty road was not really very powerful, for it was only late April, though a very summerlike day. Peggy left off crying and said no more, but leant contentedly enough against Sarah.

"I'm comf'able now," she said, closing her eyes "Thank you, Light Smiley. I'll soon be rested, and then we'll go on."

But in a moment or two, by the way she breathed, Sarah saw that she had fallen asleep.

"Bless us," thought the little guardian to herself, "she may sleep for hours. Whatever 'ull I do? She's that tired—and when she wakes she'll be that 'ungry, there'll be no getting her along. She'll be quite faint-like. If I dared leave her, I'd run on till I found the road and got somebody to 'elp carry her. But I dursn't. If she woked up and me gone, she'd be runnin' who knows where and mebbe never be found again. Poor missy—it'll be lock-ups and

"And at last, though she was really so anxious and distressed, the quiet and the mild air, and the idleness perhaps, to which none of the Simpkins family were much accustomed, all joined together and by degrees hushed poor Light Smiley to sleep, her arms clasped round Peggy as if to protect her from any possible danger." p.177

no mistake, wusser I dessay for me, and quite right too. Mother'll never say I'm fit for a nussery after makin' sich a fool of myself."

And in spite of her courage, the tears began to trickle down Sarah's face. Peggy looked so white and tiny, lying there almost in her arms, that it made her heart ache to see her. So she shut her own eyes and tried to think what to do. And the thinking grew gradually confused and mixed up with all sorts of other thinkings. Sarah fancied she heard her mother calling her, and she tried to answer, but somehow the words would not come.

And at last, though she was really so anxious and distressed, the quiet and the mild air, and the idleness perhaps, to which none of the Simpkins family were much accustomed, all joined together and by degrees hushed poor Light Smiley to sleep, her arms clasped round Peggy as if to protect her from any possible danger.

It would have been a touching picture, had there been any one there to see. Unluckily, not merely for the sake of the picture, but for that of the children themselves, there was no one.

CHAPTER XII

THE SHOES-LADY AGAIN

"I'll love you through the happy years,
Till I'm a nice old lady."
Poems written for a Child.

WHEN they woke, both of them at the same moment it seemed, though probably one had roused the other without knowing it, the sun had gone, the sky looked dull, it felt chilly and strange. Peggy had thought it must be past dinner-time before they had sat down to rest; it seemed now as if it must be past tea-time too!

Sarah started up, Peggy feebly clinging to her.

"Oh dear, dear," said Sarah, "I shouldn't have gone to sleep, and it's got that cold!" She was shivering herself, but Peggy seemed much the worse of the two. She was white and pinched looking, and as if she were half stupefied.

"I'm so cold," she said, "and so hungry. I thought I was in bed at home. I do so want to go home. I'm sure it's very late, Light Smiley; do take me home."

"I'm sure, missy, it's what I want to do," said poor Sarah. "I'm afeared it's a-going to rain, and whatever 'ull we do then? You wouldn't wait 'ere a minute, would you, while I run to see if there's a road near?"

"No, no," said Peggy, "I won't stay alone. I'm very, very frightened, Light Smiley, and I think I'm going to die."

"Oh Lor', missy, don't you say that," said Sarah, in terror. "If you can't walk I'll carry you."

"I'll try to walk," said Peggy, picking up some spirit when she saw Sarah's white face.

And then the two set off again, dazed and miserable, very different from the bright little pair that had started up Fernley Road that morning.

Things, however, having got to the worst, began to mend, or at least were beginning to mend for them, though Peggy and Sarah did not just yet know it. Not far from the edge of the field where they were, a little bridle-path led into a lane, and a

few yards down this lane brought them out upon Fernley Road again at last.

"I see the mountings," cried Peggy, "oh, Light Smiley, Peggy sees the mountings. P'raps we won't die, oh p'raps we'll get home safe again."

But though she had been trying to be brave, now that she began to hope again, it was too much for her poor little nerves—Peggy burst into loud sobbing.

"Oh, dear missy, try not to cry," said Sarah. "There—there—where's your hankercher?" and she dived into Peggy's pocket in search of it. And as she pulled it out, out tumbled at the same time the two little scarlet shoes, falling on the ground.

"Oh Light Smiley, my red shoes. They'll be all spoilt and dirtied," said Peggy, as well as she could, for Sarah was dabbing the handkerchief all over her face.

Sarah stooped to pick them up; both children were too much engaged to notice the sound of wheels coming quickly along the quiet road. But the sight of a speck of dirt on one of the shoes set Peggy off crying again, and she cried for once pretty loudly. The wheels came nearer, and then stopped, and this made Sarah look round. A pony-carriage driven by

a lady had drawn up just beside them. The groom, sitting behind, jumped down, though looking as if he did not know what he was to do.

"What is the matter, little girls?" said the lady.

"It's, please 'm—we've lost our road—it's all along o' me, mum—but I didn't mean no 'arm, only missy's that wore out 'm, and——" but before Sarah could get farther, she was stopped by a sort of cry from both the lady and Peggy at once.

"Oh, oh," called out Peggy, "it's the shoes-lady—oh, pelease, pelease, take me home," and she seemed ready to dart into the lady's arms.

"I do believe," *she* said, "I do believe it's the little girl I saw at the bootmaker's, and—yes, of course it is—there are the shoes themselves! My dear child, whatever are you doing to be so far from home—at least I suppose you live in the town?—and what have you got the dolly's shoes with you for?"

"I brought them for them to see the mountings and the white cottage," sobbed Peggy; "but I'm so cold and hungry, pelease take me home, oh, pelease, do."

The lady seemed rather troubled. Even if she had not remembered Peggy, she would have seen in

a moment that she was a little lady, though Peggy looked miserable enough with her torn clothes, and scratched and tear-stained face.

"Poor child," she said, "tell me your name, and where you live."

"I'm Peggy, but I don't 'amember my nother name, 'cos I'm tired and it's very long," she said.

The lady looked at Sarah. Sarah shook her head.

"No, mum, I don't know it neither, but I knows the name of the street. 'Tis Bernard Street 'm—off Fernley Road, and their back winders looks over to us. We're Simpkinses 'm, and missy's mar knows as we're 'speckable, and mother she never thought when she told me to take back the humberellar, as I'd lead missy sich a dance. I'll never do for the nussery, no never. I'm not steady enough," and here Light Smiley gave signs of crying herself.

It was not easy for the lady to make out the story, but by degrees, with patience she did so. But while talking she had lifted Peggy into the carriage beside her, and wrapped her up in a shawl that lay on the seat, Peggy nestling in, quite contentedly.

"Now," said the lady, "you get in too, Sarah Simpkins, and I'll drive you both home. I was on

my way home out into the country, but I can't leave you here on the road. This is Fernley Road, but it's quite four miles from the town."

In scrambled Sarah, divided between fear of her own and Peggy's relations' scoldings when they got home, and the delight and honour of driving in a carriage! The groom would have liked to look grumpy, I am quite sure, but he dared not. Peggy, for her part, crept closer and closer to the lady, and ended by falling asleep again, so that it was a good thing Light Smiley was sitting on the other side, to keep her from falling out.

The four miles seemed very short to Sarah, and as they got into the outskirts of the town her face grew longer and longer.

"I'm more'n half a mind to run away, I 'ave," she said to herself, quite unaware she was speaking aloud. "It'll be more'n I can stand, mother and Rebecca and all on 'em down on me, for I didn't mean no 'arm. I'd best run away."

The lady turned to her, hitherto she had not taken much notice of Sarah, but now she felt sorry for the little girl.

"What are you saying, my dear?" she said gently, though all the same her voice made Sarah

jump. "Are you afraid of going home? You have not done anything naughty, exactly, as far as I understand. It was only thoughtless. I will go with you to your home if you like, and explain to your mother how it was."

"Oh thank you, mum," said Sarah, eagerly, her spirits rising again at once; "you see, mum, I do so want to be in the nussery onst I'm big enough, and I was so afeared mother'd never think of it again. I only wanted to please little missy, for she seemed so lonely like, her mar and all bein' away and no one for to take her a walk. She's a sweet little missy, she is, but she's only a baby, so to say; she do have such funny fancies. 'Twas all to see the cottage on the 'ills she wanted to come up Fernley Road so badly."

"The cottage—what cottage?" asked the lady.

Sarah tried to explain, and gradually the lady got to understand what little Peggy had meant about bringing the red shoes "to see the mountings and the cottage."

"She's always a-talking of the country, and father lived there when he was a boy, and missy had got it in her 'ead that he lived in a white cottage, like the one she fancies about," Sarah went on.

"I would like to take her out into the real country, poor little pet," said the lady, looking tenderly at the sweet tiny face of the sleeping child. She loved all children, but little girls of Peggy's age were especially dear to her, for many years before she had had a younger sister who had died, and the thought of her had come into her mind the first time she had seen Peggy at the door of the shoe shop. "If I can see any of her friends I will ask them to let her spend a day with me," she went on, speaking more to herself than to Sarah.

As they turned into Bernard Street a cab dashed past them coming very fast from the opposite direction. It drew up in front of the house which Sarah was just that moment pointing out to the lady as Peggy's home, and a gentleman, followed by a young woman, sprang out. The door was opened almost as soon as they rang, and then the three, the other servant who had answered the bell, the young woman and the gentleman, all stood together on the steps talking so anxiously and eagerly that for a moment or two they did not notice the pony-carriage, and though the groom knew the whole story by this time and had jumped down at once, he

was far too proper to do anything till he had his lady's orders.

"Ask the gentleman to speak to me," said the lady, "and you jump out, little Sarah. I think he must be Peggy's father."

He had turned round by this time and came hurrying forward. The moment the lady saw him she knew she had guessed right. He was so like Peggy—fair and gray-eyed, and with the same gentle expression, and very young looking to be the father not only of Peggy, but of *big* little boys like Thor and Terry. His face looked pale and anxious, but the moment he caught sight of the little sleeping figure leaning against the lady it all lighted up and a red flush came into his cheeks.

"Oh—thank God," he exclaimed, "my little Peggy! You have found her! How good of you! But—she is not hurt?—she is all right?"

"Yes—yes—only cold and hungry and tired," said the lady eagerly, for Peggy did look rather miserable still. "Will you lift her out?" and as he did so, she got out herself, and turned to Sarah. "May I bring this other child in for a moment," she said, "and then I can explain it all?"

Sarah followed gladly, but a sudden thought

struck her, "Please 'm," she said, bravely, though the tears came to her eyes as she spoke, "p'raps I'd best run 'ome ; mother'll be frightened about me."

"But I promised you should not be scolded," said the lady ; "stay," and she turned to Fanny, "she lives close to, she says."

"At the back—over the cobbler's," said Sarah, readily.

"Can you let her mother know she's all right, then? And say I am coming to speak to her in a moment," said the lady, and Fanny went off. She had been so terrified about Peggy, and so afraid that she would be blamed for carelessness, that she dared not wait, though she was dying with curiosity to know the whole story and what one of the Simpkins children could have had to do with it.

Peggy awoke by the time her father had got her into the dining-room, where cook had made a good fire and laid out Peggy's dinner and tea in one to be all ready, for the poor woman had been hoping every instant for the last few hours that the little girl would be brought home again. It had been difficult to find Peggy's father, as he was not at his office, and Fanny had been there two or three times to fetch him.

"Oh dear papa," were Peggy's first words, "I'm so glad to be home. I'll never go up Fernley Road again; but I did so want to see the cottage and the mountings plainer. And it wasn't Light Smiley's fault. She was very good to me, and I was very cross."

This did not much clear up matters. Indeed Peggy's papa was afraid for a minute or two that his little girl was going to have a fever, and that her mind was wandering. But all such fears were soon set at rest, and when the lady went off with Sarah, she left Peggy setting to work very happily at her dinner or tea, she was not sure which to call it.

"And you will let her come to spend the day with me to-morrow?" said the lady, as she shook hands with Peggy's father. "I shall be driving this way, and I can call for her. I should not be happy not to know that she was none the worse for her adventures to-day."

Then the lady took Sarah by the hand and went round with her to her home in the back street, telling the groom to wait for her at the corner.

It was well she went herself, for otherwise I am afraid poor Light Smiley would not have escaped the scolding she dreaded. Her mother and sisters

had been very unhappy and frightened about her, and when people—especially poor mothers like Mrs. Simpkins, with "so many children that they don't know what to do"—are anxious and frightened, I have often noticed that it makes them very cross.

As it was, however, the lady managed to smoothe it all down, and before she left she got not only Sarah's mother, but Rebecca and Mary-Hann and all of them to promise to say no more about it.

"'Tisn't only for myself I was feelin' so put about, you see, ma'am," said Mrs. Simpkins, "but when I sent over the way and found the little missy was not to be found it flashed upon me like a lightenin' streak—it did that, ma'am—that the two was off together. And if any 'arm had come to the little lady through one of mine, so to say, it would 'ave gone nigh to break my 'art. For their mar is a sweet lady—a real feelin' lady is their mar."

"And a kind friend to you, I daresay," said the stranger.

"Couldn't be a kinder as far as friendly words and old clotheses goes," said Mrs. Simpkins. "But she's a large little fam'ly of her own, and not so very strong in 'ealth, and plenty to do with their money. And so to speak strangers in the place, though she

'ave said she'd do her best to get a place in a nice fam'ly for one of my girls."

The lady glanced at the group of sisters.

"Yes," she said, "I should think you could spare one or two. How would you like to be in a kitchen?" she added, turning to Rebecca.

The girl blushed so that her face matched her arms, and she looked more "reddy" than ever. But she shook her head.

"I'm afraid——" she began.

"No, ma'am, thank you kindly, but I couldn't spare Rebecca," the mother interrupted. "If it were for Mary-Hann now—Matilda-Jane's coming on and could take her place. Only, for I couldn't deceive you, ma'am, she's rather deaf."

"I shouldn't mind that," said the lady, who was pleased by Mary-Ann's bright eyes and pleasant face. "I think deaf people sometimes work better than quick-hearing ones, besides, it may perhaps be cured. I will speak about her to my housekeeper and let you know. And you, Sarah, you are to be in the nursery some day."

Sarah grinned with delight.

"Not just yet," said Mrs. Simpkins; "she 'ave a deal to learn, 'ave Sarah. Schooling and stiddiness

to begin with. She don't mean no 'arm, I'll allow."

"No; I'm sure she wants to be a very good girl," said the lady. "She was very kind and gentle to little Miss Peggy. So I won't forget you either, Sarah, when the time comes."

And then the lady said good-bye to them all, and Mrs. Simpkins's heart felt lighter than for long, for she was sure that through this new friend she might get the start in life she had been hoping for, for her many daughters.

Peggy slept off her fatigue, and by the next morning she was quite bright again and able to listen to and understand papa's explanation of how, though without meaning to be disobedient, she had done wrong the day before in setting off with Sarah Simpkins as she had done. Two or three tears rolled slowly down her cheeks as she heard what he said.

"I meant to be so good while mamma was away," she whispered. "But I'll never do it again, papa. I'll stay quiet in the nursery all alone, even if Miss Earnshaw doesn't come back at all."

For a message had come from the dressmaker that her mother was very ill, as Fanny had feared.

and that she was afraid she would not be able to leave her for several days.

"It won't be so bad as that, dear," said her father. "Mamma will be back in five days now, and I don't think you are likely to be left alone in the nursery —certainly not to-day;" and then he told her about the lady having asked her to spend the day out in the country with her, and that Peggy must be ready by twelve o'clock, not to keep her new friend waiting.

Peggy's eyes gleamed with delight.

"Out into the country?" she said. "Oh, how lovely! And oh, papa, do you think *p'raps* she lives in a white cottage?"

Papa shook his head.

"I'm afraid it's not a cottage at all where she lives," he said. "But I'm sure it is a very pretty house, and let us hope it is a white one."

"No," said Peggy, "you don't understand, papa —not as well as mamma does. I don't care what colour it is if it's only an 'ouse."

And she couldn't understand why papa laughed so that he really couldn't correct her. "I'm afraid, Peggy," he said, "you've been taking lessons from little Miss Simpkins. It's time mamma came home again to look after you."

"Yes, I wish mamma was come home again," said Peggy. "We can't do without her, can we, papa?"

But when the dear little pony carriage came up to the door, and Peggy got in and drove off with her kind friend, she was so happy that she had not even time to wish for mamma.

And what a delightful day she had! The lady's house was very pretty, and the gardens and woods in which it stood even prettier in Peggy's opinion. And though it was not a cottage, there were all the country things to see which Peggy was so fond of—cocks and hens, and cows, and in one field lots of sheep and sweet little lambkins. There were pigs too, which Peggy would not look at, but ran away to the other end of the yard as soon as she heard them "grumphing," which amused the lady very much. And in the afternoon she went a walk with her friend through the village, where there were several pretty cottages, but none that quite fitted Peggy's fancy. When they came in again Peggy stood at the drawing-room window, which looked out towards Brackenshire, without speaking.

"You like that view, don't you, dear?" said the lady. "You can see the hills?"

"Yes," said Peggy, "I can see the mountings, but not the white cottage. It's got turned wrong somehow, from here. I can only see *it* from the nursery window at home," and she gave a very little sigh.

"Some day," said the lady, "some day in the summer when the afternoons are very long, I will drive you right out a long way among the hills, and perhaps we'll find the cottage then. For I hope your mamma will often let you come to see me, my little Peggy."

"Yes," said Peggy, "that would be lovely. I *wonder* if we'd find the white cottage."

No, they never did! The sweet long summer days came, and many a bright and happy one Peggy spent with her kind friend, but they never found the white cottage on the hill. Peggy knew it so well in her mind, she felt she could not mistake it, but though she saw many white cottages which any one else *might* have thought was it, she knew better. And each time, though she sighed a little, she hoped again.

But before another summer came round Peggy and her father and mother, and Thor, and Terry, and Hal, and Baldwin, and Baby had all gone away—far away to the south, many hours' journey from the

dingy town and the Fernley Road, and the queer old house in the back street where lived the cobbler and old Mother Whelan and Brown Smiley and Light Smiley and all the rest of them. Far away too from the hills and the strange white speck in the distance which Peggy called her cottage.

So it never was more than a dream to her after all, and perhaps—perhaps it was best so? For nothing has ever spoilt the sweetness and the mystery of the childish fancy—she can see it with her mind's eye still—the soft white speck on the far-away, blue hills—she can see it and think of it and make fancies about it even now—now that she has climbed a long, long way up the mountain of life, and will soon be creeping slowly down the other side, where the sun still shines, however, and there are even more beautiful things to hope for than the sweetest dreams of childhood.

THE END

Printed in Great Britain by R. & R. Clark, Limited, *Edinburgh.*

T3-BPE-452